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Regimbagh

by

G. Mawdsley

1869





BEGUMBACH

AN

EPISODE OF THE INDIAN MUTINY.

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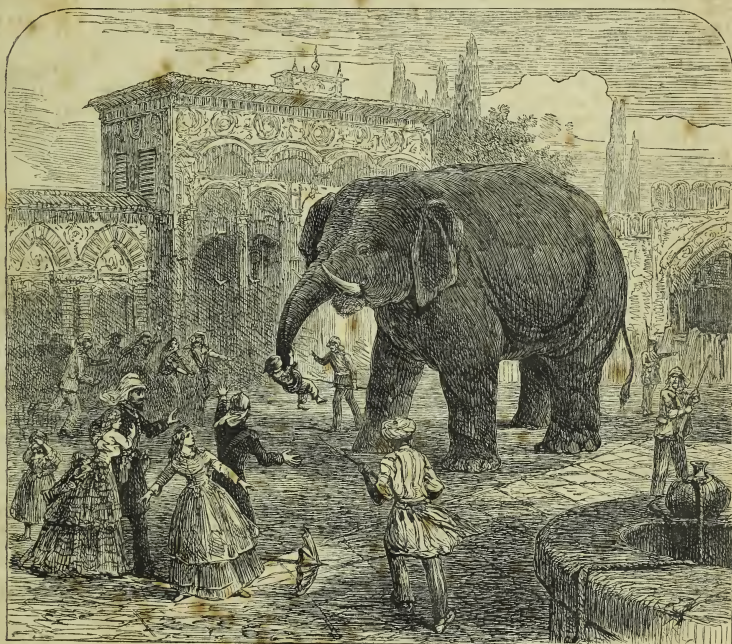
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BEGUMBACH.

INTRODUCTION.

I've waited all these years, expecting some one or another would give a full and true account of it all; but little thinking it would ever come to be my task. For it's not in my way; but seeing how much has been said about other parts and other people's sufferings, while ours never so much as came in for a line of newspaper, I can't think it's fair; and as fairness

is what I always did like, I set to, very much against my will; while, on account of my empty sleeve, the paper keeps slipping and sliding about, so that I can only hold it quiet by putting the lead inkstand on one corner, and my tobacco-jar on the other. You see, I'm not much at home at this sort of thing; and though, if you put a pipe and a glass of something

before me, I could tell you all about it, taking my time, like, it seems that won't do. I said: 'Why don't you write it down as I tell it, so as other people could read all about it?' But 'No,' he says; 'I could do it in my fashion, but I want it to be in your simple unadorned style; so set to and do it.'

I daresay a good many of you know me—seen me often in Bond Street, at Facet's door—Facet's, you know, the great jeweller, where I stand and open carriages, or take messages, or small parcels with no end of valuables in them, for I'm trusted. Smith, my name is, Isaac Smith; and I'm that tallish, grisly fellow with the seam down one side of my face, my left sleeve looped up to my button, and not a speck to be seen on that 'commissionnaire's' uniform, upon whose breast I've got three medals.

I was standing one day, waiting patiently for something to do, when a tallish gentleman came up, nodded as if he knew me well, and I saluted.

'Lose that limb in the Crimea, my man?' he said. 'No, sir. Mutiny,' I said, standing as stiff as use had made nature with me.

And then he asked me a lot more questions, and I answered him; and the end of it was that one evening I went to his house, and he had me in, and did what was wanted to set me off. I'd had a little bit of an itching to try something of the kind, I must own, for long enough, but his words started me; and in consequence I got a quire of the best foolscap paper, and a pen'orth of pens, and here 's my story.

I.

Dub-dub-dub-dub-dub. Just one light beat given by the boys in front—the light sharp tap upon their drums, to give the time for the march; and in heavy order there we were, her Majesty's 156th Regiment of Light Infantry, making our way over the dusty roads with the hot morning sun beating down upon our heads. We were marching very loosely, though, for the men were tired, and we were longing for the halt to be called, so that we might rest during the heat of the day, and then go on again. Tents, baggage-wagons, women, children, elephants, all were there; and we were getting over the ground at the rate of about twenty miles a day, on our way up to the station, where we were to relieve a regiment going home.

I don't know what we should have done if it hadn't been for Harry Lant, the weather being very trying, almost as trying as our hot red coats and heavy knapsacks, and flower-pot bushies, with a round white ball like a child's plaything on the top; but no matter how tired he was, Harry Lant had always something to say or do, and even if the colonel was close by, he'd say or do it. Now, there happened to be an elephant walking along by our side, with the captain of our company, one of the lieutenants, and a couple of women in the howdah; while a black nigger fellow, in clean white calico clothes, and not much of 'em, and a muslin turban, and a good deal of it, was stridding on the creature's neck, rolling his eyes about, and flourishing an iron toasting-fork sort of thing, with which he drove the great flap-eared patient beast. The men were beginning to grumble gently, and shifting their guns from side to side, and sneezing, and coughing, and choking in the kicked-up dust, like a flock of sheep, when Captain Dyer scrambles down off the elephant, and takes his place alongside us,

crying out cheerily: 'Only another mile, my lads, and then breakfast.'

We gave him a cheer, and another half-mile was got over, when once more the boys began to flag terribly, and even Harry Lant was silent, which, seeing what Harry Lant was, means a wonderful deal more respecting the weather than any number of degrees on a thermometer, I can tell you; but I looked round at him, and he knew what it meant, and, slipping out, he goes up to the elephant. 'Carry your trunk, sir,' he says; and taking gently hold of the great beast's soft nose, he laid it upon his shoulder, and marched on like that, with the men roaring with laughter.

'Pulla-wulla. Ma-pa-na,' shouted the nigger who was driving, or something that sounded like it, for of all the rum lingoes ever spoke, theirs is about the rummest, and always put me in mind of the fal-lal-la or tol-de-rol chorus of a song.

'All right. I'll take care!' sings out Harry; and on he marched, with the great soft-footed beast lifting its round pats and putting them down gently so as not to hurt Harry; and, trifling as that act was, it meant a great deal, as you'll see if you read on, while just then it got our poor fellows over the last half-mile without one falling out; and then the halt was called; men wheeled into line; we were dismissed; and soon after we were lounging about, under such shade as we could manage to get in the thin topes of trees.

II.

That's a pretty busy time, that first half-hour after a halt: what with setting loosely up a few tents, and getting a fire lighted, and fetching water; but in spite of our being tired, we soon had things right. There was the colonel's tent, Colonel Maine's—a little stout man, that we all used to laugh at, because he was such a little, round, good-tempered chap, who never troubled about anything, for we hadn't learned then what was lying asleep in his brave little body, waiting to be brought out. Then there was the mess tent for the officers, and the hospital tent for those on the sick-list, beside our bell tents, that we shouldn't have set up at all, only to act as sun-shades. But, of course, the principal tent was the colonel's.

Well, there they were, the colonel and his lady, Mrs Maine—a nice, kindly-spoken, youngish woman: twenty years younger than he, she was; but, for all that, a happier couple never breathed; and they two used to seem as if the regiment, and India, and all the natives were made on purpose to fall down and worship the two little golden idols they'd set up—a little girl and a little boy, you know. Cock Robin and Jenny Wren, we chaps used to call them, though Jenny Wren was about a year and a half the oldest. And I believe it was from living in France a bit, that the colonel's wife had got the notion of dressing them so; but it would have done your heart good to see those two children—the boy with his little red tunic and his sword, and the girl with her red jacket and belt, and a little canteen of wine and water, and a tiny tin mug; and them little things driving the old black ayah half-wild with the way they used to dodge away from her to get amongst the men, who took no end of delight in bamboozling the fat old woman when she was hunting for them; sending them here, and there, and everywhere, till she'd turn round and make signs with her hands, and spit on

the ground, which was her way of cursing us. For I must say that we English were very, very careless about what we did or said to the natives. Officers and men, all alike, seemed to look upon them as something very little better than beasts, and talked to them as if they had no feelings at all, little thinking what fierce masters the trampled slaves could turn out, if ever they had their day—the day that the old proverb says is sure to come for every dog; and there was not a soul among us then that had the least bit of suspicion that the dog—by which, you know, I mean the Indian generally—was going mad, and sharpening those teeth of his ready to bite.

Well, as a matter of course, there were other people in our regiment that I ought to mention: Captain Dyer I did name; but there was a lieutenant, a very good-looking young fellow, who was a great favourite with Mrs Colonel Maine; and he dined a deal with them at all times, besides being a great chum of Captain Dyer's—they two shooting together, and being like brothers, though there was a something in Lieutenant Leigh that I never seemed to take to. Then there was the doctor—a Welshman he was, and he used to make it his boast that our regiment was about the healthiest anywhere; and I tell you what it is, if you were ill once, and in hospital, as we call it—though, you know, with a marching regiment that only means anywhere till you get well—I say, if you were ill once, and under his hands, you'd think twice before you made up your mind to be ill again, and be very bad too before you went to him. Pestle, we used to call him, though his name was Hughes; and how we men did hate him, mortally, till we found out his real character, when we were lying out to pieces almost, and him ready to cry over us at times as he tried to bring us round. 'Hold up, my lads,' he'd say, 'only another hour, and you'll be round the corner!' when what there was left of us did him justice. Then, of course, there were other officers, and some away with the major and another battalion of our regiment at Wallahbad; but they've nothing to do with my story.

I do not think I can do better than introduce you to our mess on the very morning of this halt, when, after cooling myself with a pipe, just the same as I should have warmed myself with a pipe if it had been in Canada or Nova Scotia, I walked up to find all ready for breakfast, and Mrs Bantem making the tea.

Some of the men didn't fail to laugh at us who took our tea for breakfast; but all the same I liked it, for it always took me home, tea did—and to the days when my poor old mother used to say that there never was such a boy for bread and butter as I was; not as there was ever so much butter that she need have grumbled, whatever I cost for bread; and though Mrs Bantem wasn't a bit like my mother, she brought up the homely thoughts. Mrs Bantem was, I should say, about the biggest and ugliest woman I ever saw in my life. She stood five feet eleven and a half in her stockings, for Joe Bantem got Sergeant Buller to take her under the standard one day. She'd got a face nearly as dark as a black's; she'd got a moustache, and a good one too; and a great coarse look about her altogether. Measles—I'll tell you who he was directly—Measles used to say she was a horse god-mother; and they didn't seem to like one another; but Joe Bantem was as proud of that woman as she was of him; and if any one hinted about her looks, he used

to laugh, and say that was only the outside rind, and talk about the juice. But all the same, though, no one couldn't be long with that woman without knowing her flavour. It was a sight to see her and Joe together, for he was just a nice middle size—five feet seven and a half—and as pretty a pink and white, brown-whiskered, open-faced man as ever you saw. We all got tanned and coppered over and over again, but Joe kept as nice and fresh and fair as on the day we embarked from Gosport years before; and the standing joke was that Mrs Bantem had a preparation for keeping his complexion all square.

Joe Bantem knew what he was about, though, for one day when a nasty remark had been made by the men of another regiment, he got talking to me in confidence over our pipes, and he swore that there wasn't a better woman living; and he was right, for I'm ready now at this present moment to take the Book in my hand, and swear the same thing before all the judges in Old England. For you see we're such duffers, we men: shew us a pretty bit of pink and white, and we run mad after it; while all the time we're running away from no end of what's solid and good, and true, and such as'll wear well, and shew fast colours, long after your pink and white's got faded and grimy. Not as I've much room to talk. But present company, you know, and setra. What, though, as a rule, does your pretty pink and white know about buttons, or darning, or cooking? Why, we had the very best of cooking; not boiled tag and rag, but nice stews and roasts and hashes, when other men were growling over a dog's-meat dinner. We had the sweetest of clean sheets, and never a button off; our stockings were darned; and only let one of us—Measles, for instance—take a drop more than he ought, just see how she'd drop on to him, that's all. If his head didn't ache before, it would ache then; and I can see as plain now as if it was only this minute, instead of years ago, her boxing Measles' ears, and threatening to turn him out to another mess if he didn't keep sober. And she would have turned him over too, only, as she said to Joe, and Joe told me, it might have been the poor fellow's ruin, seeing how weak he was, and easily led away. The long and short of it is, Mrs Bantem was a good motherly woman of forty; and those who had anything to say against her, said it out of jealousy, and all I have to say now is what I've said before: she only had one fault, and that is, she never had any little Bantems to make wives for honest soldiers to come; and wherever she is, my wish is that she may live happy and venerable to a hundred.

That brings me to Measles. Bigley his name was; but he'd had the small-pox very bad when a child, through not being vaccinated; and his face was all picked out in holes, so round and smooth that you might have stood peas in them all over his cheeks and forehead, and they wouldn't have fallen off; so we called him Measles. If any of you say 'Why?' I don't know no more than I have said.

He was a sour-tempered sort of fellow was Measles, who listed because his sweetheart laughed at him; not that he cared for her, but he didn't like to be laughed at, so he listed out of spite, as he said, and that made him spiteful. He was always grumbling about not getting his promotion, and sneering at everything and everybody, and quarrelling with Harry Lant, him, you know, as carried the elephant's trunk; while Harry was never happy without he was teasing

him, so that sometimes there was a deal of hot water spilled in our mess.

And now I think I've only got to name three of the drum-boys, that Mrs Bantem ruled like a rod of iron, though all for their good, and then I've done.

Well, we had our breakfast, and thoroughly enjoyed it, sitting out there in the shade. Measles grumbled about the water, just because it happened to be better than usual; for sometimes we soldiers out there in India used to drink water that was terrible lively before it had been cooked in the kettle; for though water insects out there can stand a deal of heat, they couldn't stand a fire. Mrs Bantem was washing up the things afterwards, and talking about dinner; Harry Lant was picking up all the odds and ends, to carry off to the great elephant, standing just then in the best bit of shade he could find, flapping his great ears about, blinking his little pig's eyes, and turning his trunk and his tail into two pendulums, swinging them backwards and forwards as regular as clockwork, and all the time watching Harry, when Measles says all at once: 'Here come some lunatics!'

III.

Now, after what I've told you about Measles' listing for spite, you will easily understand that the fact of his calling any one a lunatic did not prove a want of common reason in the person spoken about; but what he meant was, that the people coming up were half-mad for travelling when the sun was so high, and had got so much power.

I looked up and saw, about a mile off, coming over the long straight level plain, what seemed to be an elephant, and a man or two on horseback; and before I had been looking above a minute, I saw Captain Dyer cross over to the colonel's tent, and then point in the direction of the coming elephant. The next minute, he crossed over to where we were. 'Seen Lieutenant Leigh?' he says in his quick way.

'No, sir; not since breakfast.'

'Send him after me, if he comes in sight. Tell him Miss Ross and party are yonder, and I've ridden on to meet them.'

The next minute he had gone, taken a horse from a sycee, and in spite of the heat, cantered off to meet the party with the elephant, the air being that clear that I could see him go right up, turn his horse round, and ride gently back by the elephant's side.

I did not see anything of the lieutenant, and, to tell the truth, I forgot all about him, for I was thinking about the party coming, for I had somehow heard a little about Mrs Maine's sister coming out from the old country to stay with her. If I recollect right, the black nurse told Mrs Bantem, and she mentioned it. This party, then, I supposed contained the lady herself; and it was as I thought. We had had to leave Patna unexpectedly to relieve the regiment ordered home; and the lady, according to orders, had followed us, for this was only our second day's march.

I suppose it was my pipe made me settle down to watch the coming party, and wonder what sort of a body Miss Ross would be, and whether anything like her sister. Then I wondered who would marry her, for, as you know, ladies are not very long out in India without picking up a husband. 'Perhaps,' I said to myself, 'it will be the lieutenant;' but ten minutes after, as the elephant shambled up, I altered my mind, for Captain Dyer was ambling along beside the

great beast, and his was the hand that helped the lady down—a tall, handsome, self-possessed girl, who seemed quite to take the lead, and kiss and soothe the sister, when she ran out of the tent to throw her arms round the new-comer's neck.

'At last, then, Elsie,' Mrs Colonel said out aloud. 'You've had a long dreary ride.'

'Not during the last ten minutes,' Miss Ross said, laughing in a bright, merry, free-hearted way. 'Lieutenant Leigh has been welcoming me most cordially.'

'Who?' exclaimed Mrs Colonel, staring from one to the other.

'Lieutenant Leigh,' said Miss Ross.

'I'm afraid I am to blame for not announcing myself,' said Captain Dyer, lifting his muslin-covered cap. 'Your sister, Miss Ross, asked me to ride to meet you, in Lieutenant Leigh's absence.'

'You, then?'—

'I am only Lawrence Dyer, his friend,' said the captain smiling.

It's a singular thing that just then, as I saw the young lady blush deeply, and Mrs Colonel look annoyed, I muttered to myself, 'Something will come of this,' because, if there's anything I hate, it's for a man to set himself up for a prophet. But it looked to me as if the captain had been taking Lieutenant Leigh's place, and that Miss Ross, as was really the case, though she had never seen him, had heard him so much talked of by her sister, that she had welcomed him, as she thought, quite as an old friend, when all the time she had been talking to Captain Dyer.

And I was not the only one who thought about it; else why did Mrs Colonel look annoyed, and the colonel, who came paddling out, exclaim loudly: 'Why, Leigh, look alive, man! here's Dyer been stealing a march upon you. Why, where have you been?'

I did not hear what the lieutenant said, for my attention was just then taken up by something else, but I saw him go up to Miss Ross, holding out his hand, while the meeting was very formal; but, as I told you, my attention was taken up by something else, and that something was a little dark, bright, eager, earnest face, with a pair of sharp eyes, and a little mocking-looking mouth; and as Captain Dyer had helped Miss Ross down with the steps from the howdah, so did I help down Lizzy Green, her maid; to get, by way of thanks, a half-saucy look, a nod of the head, and the sight of a pretty little tripping pair of ankles going over the hot sandy dust towards the tent.

But the next minute she was back, to ask about some luggage—a bullock-trunk or two—and she was coming up to me, as I eagerly stepped forward to meet her, when she seemed, as it were, to take it into her head to shy at me, going instead to Harry Lant, who had just come up, and who, on hearing what she wanted, placed his hands, with a grave sloop, upon his head, and made her a regular eastern salaam, ending by telling her that her slave would obey her commands. All of which seemed to grit upon me terribly; I didn't know why, then, but I found out afterwards, though not for many days to come.

We had the route given us for Begumbagh, a town that, in the old days, had been rather famous for its grandeur; but, from what I had heard, it was likely to turn out a very hot, dry, dusty, miserable spot; and I used to get reckoning up how long we should be frizzling out there in India before we got the

orders for home; and put it at the lowest calculation, I could not make less of it than five years. At all events, we who were soldiers had made our own beds, and had to lie upon them, whether it was at home or abroad; and, as Mrs Bantem used to say to us, 'Where was the use of grumbling?' There were troubles in every life, even if it was a civilian's—as we soldiers always called those who didn't wear the Queen's uniform—and it was very doubtful whether we should have been a bit happier, if we had been in any other line. But all the same, government might have made things a little better for us in the way of suitable clothes, and things proper for the climate.

And so on we went: marching mornings and nights; camping all through the hot day; and it was not long before we found that, in Miss Ross, we men had got something else beside the children to worship.

But I may as well say now, and have it off my mind, that it has always struck me, that during those peaceful days, when our greatest worry was a hot march, we didn't know when we were well off, and that it wanted the troubles to come before we could see what good qualities there were in other people. Little trifling things used to make us sore—things such as we didn't notice afterwards, when great sorrows came. I know I was queer, and spiteful, and jealous, and no great wonder that, for I always was a man with a nastyish temper, and soon put out; but even Mrs Bantem used to shew that she wasn't quite perfect, for she quite upset me, one day, when Measles got talking at dinner about Lizzy Green, Miss Ross's maid, and, what was a wonderful thing for him, not finding fault. He got saying that she was a nice girl, and would make a soldier as wanted one a good wife; when Mrs Bantem fires up as spiteful as could be—I think, mind you, there'd been something wrong with the cooking that day, which had turned her a little—and she says that Lizzy was very well, but looks weren't everything, and that she was raw as raw, and would want no end of dressing before she would be good for anything; while, as to making a soldier's wife, soldiers had no business to have wives till they could buy themselves off, and turn civilians. Then, again, she seemed to have taken a sudden spite against Mrs Maine, saying that she was a poor, little, stuck-up, fine lady, and she could never have forgiven her if it had not been for those two beautiful children; though what Mrs Bantem had got to forgive the colonel's wife, I don't believe she even knew herself.

The old black ayah, too, got very much put out about this time, and all on account of the two newcomers; for when Miss Ross hadn't got the children with her, they were along with Lizzy, who, like her mistress, was new to the climate, and hadn't got into that dull listless way that comes to people who have been some time up the country. They were all fine, and fun, and energy, and the children were never happy when they were away; and of a morning, more to please Lizzy, I used to think, than the children, Harry Lant used to pick out a shady place, and then drive Chunder Chow, who was the mahout of *Nabob*, the principal elephant, half wild, by calling out his beast, and playing with him all sorts of antics.

Chunder tried all he could to stop it, but it was of no use, for Harry had got such influence over that animal that when one day he was coaxing him out to lead him under some trees, and the mahout tried to

stop him, *Nabob* makes no more ado, but lifts his great soft trunk, and rolls Mr Chunder Chow over into the grass, where he lay screeching like a parrot, and chattering like a monkey, rolling his opal eyeballs, and shewing his white teeth with fear, for he expected that *Nabob* was going to put his foot on him, and crush him to death, as is the nature of those great beasts. But not he: he only lays his trunk gently on Harry's shoulder, and follows him across the open like a great flesh-mountain, winking his little pig's eyes, whisking his tiny tail, and flapping his great ears; while the children clapped their hands as they stood in the shade with Miss Ross and Lizzy, and Captain Dyer and Lieutenant Leigh close behind.

'There's no call to be afraid, miss,' says Harry, saluting as he saw Miss Ross shrink back; and seeing how, when he said a few words in Hindustani, the great animal minded him, they stopped being afraid, and gave Harry fruit and cakes to feed the great beast with.

You see, out there in that great dull place, people are very glad to have any little trifle to amuse them, so you mustn't be surprised to hear that there used to be quite a crowd to see Harry Lant's performances, as he called them. But all the same, I didn't like his upsetting old Chunder Chow; and it seemed to me even then, that we'd managed to make another black enemy—the black ayah being the first.

However, Harry used to go on making old *Nabob* kneel down, or shake hands, or curl up his trunk, or lift him up, finishing off by going up to his head, lifting one great ear, saying they understood one another, whispering a few words, and then shutting the ear up again, so as the words shouldn't be lost before they got into the elephant's brain, as Harry explained, because they'd got a long way to go. Then Harry would lie down, and let the great beast walk backwards and forwards all over him, lifting his great feet so carefully, and setting them down close to Harry, but never touching him, except one day when, just as the great beast was passing his foot over Harry's breast, a voice called out something in Hindustani—and I knew who it was, though I didn't see—when *Nabob* puts his foot down on Harry's chest, and Lizzy gave a great scream, and we all thought the poor chap would be crushed; but not he: the great beast was took by surprise, but only for an instant, and, in his slow quiet way, he steps aside, and then touches Harry all over with his trunk; and there was no more performance that day.

'I've got my knife into Master Chunder for that,' says Harry to me, 'for I'll swear that was his voice.' And I started to find he had known it.

'I wouldn't quarrel with him,' I says quietly, 'for it strikes me he's got his knife into you.'

'You've no idea,' says Harry, 'what a nip it was. I thought it was all over; but all the same, the poor brute didn't mean it, I'd swear.'

IV.

Who could have thought just then that all that nonsense of Harry Lant's with the elephant was shaping itself for our good; but so it was, as you shall by-and-by hear. The march continued, matters seeming to go on very smoothly—but only seeming, mind you, for let alone that we were all walking upon a volcano, there was a good deal of unpleasantry

brewing. Let alone my feeling that, somehow or another, Harry Lant was not so good a mate to me as he used to be, there was a good deal wrong between Captain Dyer and Lieutenant Leigh, and it soon seemed plain that there was much more peace and comfort in our camp a week earlier than there was at the time of which I am now writing.

I used to have my turns as sentry here and there; and it was when standing stock still with my piece, that I used to see and hear so much—for in a camp it seems to be a custom for people to look upon a sentry as a something that can neither see nor hear anything but what might come in the shape of an enemy. They know he must not move from his post, which is to say that he's tied hand and foot, and perhaps from that they think that he's tied as to his senses. At all events, I got to see that when Miss Ross was seated in the colonel's tent, and Captain Dyer was near her, she seemed to grow gentle and quiet, and her eyes would light up, and her rich red lips part, as she listened to what he was saying; while, when it came to Lieutenant Leigh's turn, and he was beside her talking, she would be merry and chatty, and would laugh and talk as lively as could be. Harry Lant said it was because they were making up matters, and that some day she would be Mrs Leigh; but I didn't look at it in that light, though I said nothing.

I used to like to be sentry at the colonel's tent, on our halting for the night, when the canvas would be looped up, to let in the air, and they'd got their great globe-lamps lit, with the tops to them, to keep out the flies, and the draughts made by the punkahs swinging backwards and forwards. I used to think it quite a pretty sight, with the ladies and the three or four officers, perhaps chatting, perhaps having a little music, for Miss Ross could sing like—a like a nightingale, I was going to say; but no nightingale that I ever heard could seem to lay hold of your heart and almost bring tears into your eyes, as she did. Then she used to sing duets with Captain Dyer, because the colonel wished it, though it was plain to see Mrs Maine didn't like it, any more than did Lieutenant Leigh, who, more than once, as I've seen, walked out, looking fierce and angry, to strike off right away from the camp, perhaps not to come back for a couple of hours.

It was one night when we'd been about a fortnight on the way, for during the past week the colonel had been letting us go on very easily, I was sentry at the tent. There had been some singing, and Lieutenant Leigh had gone off in the middle of a duet. Then the doctor, the colonel, and a couple of subs were busy over a game at whist, and the black nurse had beckoned Mrs Maine out, I suppose to see something about the two children; when Captain Dyer and Miss Ross walked together just outside the tent, she holding by one of the cords, and he standing close beside her.

They did not say much, but stood looking up at the bright silver moon and the twinkling stars; while he said a word now and then about the beauty of the scene, the white tents, the twinkling lights here and there, and the soft peaceful aspect of all around; and then his voice seemed to grow lower and deeper as he spoke from time to time, though I could hardly hear a word, as I stood there like a statue watching her beautiful face, with the great clusters of hair knotted back from her broad white forehead, the moon shining

full on it, and seeming to make her eyes flash as they were turned to him.

They must have stood there full half an hour, when she turned as if to go back, but he laid his hand upon hers as it held the tent cord, and said something very earnestly, when she turned to him again to look him full in the face, and I saw that her hand was not moved.

Then they were silent for a few seconds before he spoke again, loud enough for me to hear.

'I must ask you,' he said huskily; 'my peace depends upon it. I know that it has always been understood that you were to be introduced to Lieutenant Leigh. I can see now plainly enough what are your sister's wishes; but hearts are ungovernable, Miss Ross, and I tell you earnestly, as a simple, truth-speaking man, that you have roused feelings that until now slept quietly in my breast. If I am presumptuous, forgive me—love is bold as well as timid—but at least set me at rest: tell me, is there any engagement between you and Lieutenant Leigh?'

She did not speak for a few moments, but met his gaze—so it seemed to me—without shrinking, before saying one word, so softly, that it was like one of the whispers of the breeze crossing the plain—and that word was 'No!'

'God bless you for that answer, Miss Ross—Elsie,' he said deeply; and then his head was bent down for an instant over the hand that rested on the cord, before Miss Ross glided away from him into the tent, and went and stood resting with her hand upon the colonel's shoulder, when he, evidently in high glee, began to shew her his cards, laughing and pointing to first one, and then another, for he seemed to be having luck on his side.

But I had no more eyes then for the inside of the tent, for Captain Dyer just seemed to awaken to the fact that I was standing close by him as sentry, and he gave quite a start as he looked at me for a few moments without speaking. Then he took a step forward.

'Who is this? Oh, thank goodness!' (he said those few words in an undertone, but I happened to hear them). 'Smith,' he said, 'I forgot there was a sentry there. You saw me talking to that lady?'

'Yes, sir,' I said.

'You saw everything?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And you heard all?'

'No, sir, not all; only what you said last.'

Then he was silent again for a few moments, but only to lay his hand directly after on my chest.

'Smith,' he said, 'I would rather you had not seen this; and if it had been any other man in my company, I should perhaps have offered him money, to insure that there was no idle chattering at the mess-tables; but you I ask, as a man I can trust, to give me your word of honour as a soldier to let what you have seen and heard be sacred.'

'Thank you, captain,' I said, speaking thick, for somehow his words seemed to touch me. 'You shan't repent trusting me.'

'I have no fear, Smith,' he said, speaking lightly, and as if he felt joyful, and proud, and happy.—'What a glorious night for a cigar;' and he took one out of his case, when we both started, for, as if he had that moment risen out of the ground, Lieutenant Leigh stood there close to us; and even to this day I can't

make out how he managed it, but all the same he must have seen and heard as much as I had.

'And pray, is my word of honour as a soldier to be taken, Captain Dyer? or is my silence to be bought with money?—Curse you! come this way, will you!' he hissed; for Captain Dyer had half turned, as if to avoid him, but he stepped back directly, and I saw them walk off together amongst the trees, till they were quite out of sight; and if ever I felt what it was to be tied down to one spot, I felt it then, as I walked sentry up and down by that tent watching for those two to return.

V.

Now, after giving my word of honour to hold all that sacred, some people may think I'm breaking faith in telling what I saw; but I made that right by asking the colonel's leave—he is a colonel now—and he smiled, and said that I ought to change the names, and then it would not matter.

I left off my last chapter saying how I felt being tied down to one spot, as I kept guard there; and perhaps everybody don't know that a sentry's duty is to stay in the spot where he has been posted, and that leaving it lightly might, in time of war, mean death.

I should think I watched quite an hour, wondering whether I ought to give any alarm; but I was afraid it might look foolish, for perhaps after all it might only mean a bit of a quarrel, and I could not call to mind any quarrel between officers ending in a duel.

I was glad, too, that I did not say anything, for at last I saw them coming back in the clear moonlight—clear-like as day; and then in the distance they stopped, and in a moment one figure seemed to strike the other a sharp blow, which sent him staggering back, and I could not then see who it was that was hit, till they came nearer, and I made out that it was Captain Dyer; while, if I had any doubts at first, I could have none as they came nearer and nearer, with Lieutenant Leigh talking in a big insolent way at Captain Dyer, who was very quiet, holding his handkerchief to his cheek.

So as to be as near as possible to where they were going to pass, I walked to the end of my tether, and, as they came up, Lieutenant Leigh says, in a nasty spiteful whisper: 'I should have thought you would have come into the tent to display the wound received in the lady's cause.'

'Leigh,' said Captain Dyer, taking down his white handkerchief—and in the bright moonlight I could see that his cheek was cut, and the handkerchief all bloody—'Leigh, that was an unmanly blow. You called me a coward; you struck me; and now you try to poison the wound with your bitter words. I never lift hand against the man who has taken that hand in his as my friend, but the day may come when I can prove to you that you are a liar.'

Lieutenant Leigh turned upon him fiercely, as though he would have struck him again; but Captain Dyer paid no heed to him, only walked quietly off to his quarters; while, with a sneering, scornful sort of laugh, the lieutenant went into the colonel's tent; though, if he expected to see Miss Ross, he was disappointed, for so long as I was on guard, she did not shew any more that night.

Off again the next morning, and over a hotter and dustier road than ever; and I must say that I began

to wish we were settled down in barracks again, for everything seemed to grow more and more crooked, and people more and more unpleasant. Why, even Mrs Bantem that morning before starting must shew her teeth, and snub Bantem, and then begin going on about the colonel's wife, and the fine madam, her sister, having all sorts of luxuries, while poor hard-working soldiers' wives had to bear all the burden and heat of the day; while, by way of winding up, she goes up to Harry Lant and Measles, who were, as usual, squabbling about something, and boxes both their ears, as if they had been bad boys. I saw them both colour up fierce; but the next minute Harry Lant bursts out laughing, and Measles does the same, and then they two did what I should think they never did before—they shook hands; but Mrs Bantem had no sooner turned away with tears in her eyes, because she felt so cross, than the two chaps fell out again about some stupid thing or another, and kept on snarling and snapping at each other all along the march.

But there, bless you! that wasn't all: I saw Mrs Maine talking to her sister in a quick earnest sort of way, and they both seemed out of sorts; and the colonel swore at the tent-men, and bullied the adjutant, and he came round and dropped on to us, finding fault with the men's belts, and that upset the sergeants. Then some of the baggage didn't start right, and Lieutenant Leigh had to be taken to task by Captain Dyer, as in duty bound; while, when at last we were starting, if there wasn't a tremendous outcry, and the young colonel—little Cock Robin, you know—kicking, and screaming, and fighting the old black nurse, because he mightn't draw his little sword, and march alongside of Harry Lant!

Now, I'm very particular about putting all this down, because I want you to see how we all were one with the other, and how right through the battalion little things made us out of sorts with one another, and hardly friendly enough to speak, so that the difference may strike you, and you may see in a stronger light the alteration and the behaviour of people when trouble came.

All the same, though, I don't think it's possible for anybody to make a long march in India without getting out of temper. It's my belief that the grit does it, for you do have that terribly; and what with the heat, the dust, the thirst, the government boots, that always seem as if made not to fit anybody, and the grit, I believe even a regiment all chaplains would forget their trade.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, day after day, and nearly always over wide, dreary, dusty plains. Now we'd pass a few muddy paddy-fields, or come upon a river, but not often; and I many a time used to laugh grimly to myself, as I thought what a very different place hot, dusty, dreary India was, to the glorious country I used to picture, all beautiful trees and flowers, and birds with dazzling plumage. There are bright places there, no doubt, but I never came across one, and my recollections of India are none of the most cheery.

But at last came the day when we were crossing a great wide-spread plain, in the middle of which seemed to be a few houses, with something bright here and there shining in the sun; and as we marched on, the cluster of houses appeared to grow and grow, till we halted at last in a market square of a good-sized town; and that night we were once more in barracks.

But, for my part, I was more gritty than ever; for now we did not see the colonel's lady or her sister, though I may as well own that there was some one with them that I wanted to see more than either.

They were all, of course, at the colonel's quarters, a fine old palace of a place, with a court-yard, and a tank in the centre, and trees, and a flat roof, by the side of the great square; while on one side was another great rambling place, separated by a narrowish sort of alley, used for stores and hospital purposes; and on the other side, still going along by the side of the great market square, was another building, the very fellow to the colonel's quarters, but separated by a narrow footway, some ten feet wide, and this place was occupied by the officers.

Our barracks took up another side of the square; and on the others were mosques and flat-roofed buildings, and a sort of bazaar; while all round stretched away, in narrow streets, the houses of what we men used to call the niggers. Though, speaking for myself, I used to find them, when well treated, a nice, clean, gentle sort of people. I used to look upon them as a big sort of children, in their white muslin and calico, and their simple ways of playing-like at living; and even now I haven't altered my opinion of them in general, for the great burst of frenzied passion that ran through so many of them was just like a child's uncontrolled rage.

Things were not long in settling down to the regular life: there was a little drill of a morning, and then, the rest of the day, the heat to fight with, which seemed to take all the moisture out of our bodies, and make us long for night.

I did not get put on as sentry once at the colonel's quarters, but I heard a little now and then from Mrs Bantem, who used to wash some of Mrs Maine's fine things, the black women doing everything else; and she'd often have a good grumble about 'her fine ladyship,' as she called her, and she'd pity her children. She used to pick up a good deal of information, though, and, taking a deal of interest as I did in Miss Ross, I got to know that it seemed to be quite a settled thing between her and Captain Dyer; and Bantem, who got took on now as Lieutenant Leigh's servant, used to tell his wife about how black those two used to seem one towards the other.

And so the time went on in a quiet sleepy way, the men getting lazier every day. There was nothing to stir us, only now and then we'd have a good laugh at Measles, who'd get one of his nasty fits on, and swear at all the officers round, saying he was as good as any of them, and that if he had his rights he would have been made an officer before then. Harry Lant, too, used to do his bit to make time pass away a little less dull, singing, telling stories, or getting up to some of his pranks with old *Nabob*, the elephant, making Chunder, the mahout, more mad than ever, for, no matter what he did or said, only let Harry make a sort of queer noise of his, and, just like a great flesh-mountain, that elephant would come. It didn't matter who was in the way: regiment at drill, officer, rajah, anybody, old *Nabob* would come straight away to Harry, holding out his trunk for fruit, or putting it in Harry's breast, where he'd find some bread or biscuit; and then the great brute would smooth him all over with his trunk, in a way that used to make Mrs Bantem say, that perhaps, after all, the natives weren't such fools as they looked, and that what they said about dead people going into

animal's bodies might be true after all, for, if that great overgrown beast hadn't a soul of its own, and couldn't think, she didn't know nothing, so now then!

VI.

But it was always the same; and though time was when I could have laughed as merrily as did that little Jenny Wren of the colonel's at Harry's antics, I couldn't laugh now, because it always seemed as if they were made an excuse to get Miss Ross and her maid out with the children.

A party of jugglers, or dancing-girls, or a man or two with pipes and snakes, were all very well; but I've known clever parties come round, and those I've named would hardly come out to look; and my heart, I suppose it was, if it wasn't my mind, got very sore about that time, and I used to get looking as evil at Harry Lant as Lieutenant Leigh did at the captain.

But it was a dreary time that, after all, one from which we were awakened in a sudden way, that startled us to a man.

First of all, there came a sort of shadowy rumour that something was wrong with the men of a native regiment, something to do with their caste; and before we had well realised that it was likely to be anything serious, sharp and swift came one bit of news after another, that the British officers in one native regiment had been shot down—here, there, in all directions; and then we understood that what we had taken for the flash of a solitary fire, was the firing of a big train, and that there was a great mutiny in the land. And not, mind, the mutiny or riot of a mob of roughs, but of men drilled and disciplined by British officers, with leaders of their own caste, all well armed and provided with ammunition; and the talk round our mess when we heard all this was, How will it end?

I don't think there were many who did not realise the fact that something awful was coming to pass. Measles grinned, he did, and said that there was going to be an end of British tyranny in India, and that the natives were only going to seize their own again; but the next minute, although it was quite clean, he takes his piece out of the rack, cleans it thoroughly all over again, fixes the bayonet, feels the point, and then stands at the 'present!'

'I think we can let 'em know what's what, though, my lads, if they come here,' he says, with a grim smile; when Mrs Bantem, whose breath seemed quite taken away before by the way he talked, jumped up quite happy-like, laid her great hand upon his left side, and then, turning to us, she says: 'It's beating strong.'

'What is?' says Bantem, looking puzzled.

'Measles' heart,' says Mrs Bantem; 'and I always knew it was in the right place.'

The next minute she gave Measles a slap on the back as echoed through the place, sending him staggering forward; but he only laughed and said: 'Praise the saints, I ain't Bantem.'

There was a fine deal of excitement, though, now. The colonel seemed to wake up, and with him every officer, for we expected not only news but orders every moment. Discipline, if I may say so, was buckled up tight with the tongue in the last hole; provisions and water were got in; sentries doubled, and a strange feeling of distrust and fear came upon all, for we soon saw that the people of the place hung

away from us, and though, from such an inoffensive-looking lot as we had about us, there didn't seem much to fear, yet there was no knowing what treachery we might have to encounter, and as he had to think and act for others beside himself, Colonel Maine—God bless him—took every possible precaution against danger, then hidden, but which was likely to spring into sight at any moment.

There were not many English residents at Begumbagh, but what there were came into quarters directly; and the very next morning we learned plainly enough that there was danger threatening our place by the behaviour of the natives, who packed up their few things and filed out of the town as fast as they could, so that at noonday the market-place was deserted, and, save the few we had in quarters, there was not a black face to be seen.

The next morning came without news; and I was orderly, and standing waiting in the outer court close behind the colonel, who was holding a sort of council of war with the officers, when a sentry up in the broiling sun, on the roof, calls out that a horseman was coming; and before very long, covered with sweat and dust, an orderly dragoon dashes up, his horse all panting and blown; and then coming jingling and clanking in with those spurs and that sabre of his, he hands despatches to the colonel.

I hope I may be forgiven for what I thought then, but, as I watched his ruddy face, while he read those despatches, and saw it turn all of a sickly, greeny white, I gave him the credit of being a coward; and I was not the only one who did so. We all knew that, like us, he had never seen a shot fired in anger; and something like an angry feeling of vexation came over me, I know, as I thought of what a fellow he would be to handle and risk the lives of the four hundred men under his charge there at Begumbagh.

'Dyer think I'd look like that?' says a voice close to my ear just then. 'Dyer think if I'd been made an officer, I'd ha' shewed the white feather like that?' And turning round sharp, I saw it was Measles, who was standing sentry by the gateway; and he was so disgusted, that he spat about in all directions, for he was a man who didn't smoke, like any other Christian, but chewed his tobacco like a sailor.

'Dyer,' says the colonel, the next moment, and they closed up together, but close to where we two stood—'Dyer,' he says, 'I never felt before that it would be hard to do my duty as a soldier; but, God help me, I shall have to leave Annie and the children.' There were a couple of tears rolling down the poor fellow's cheeks as he spoke, and he took Captain Dyer's hand.

'Look at him! Cuss him!' whispers Measles again; and I kicked out sharp behind, and hit him in the shin. 'He's a pretty sort of a'—

He didn't say any more just then, for, like me, he was staggered by the change that took place.

I think I've said Colonel Maine was a little, easy-going, pudgy man, with a red face; but just then, as he stood holding Captain Dyer's hand, a change seemed to come over him; he dropped the hand he had held, tightened his sword-belt, and then took a step forward, to stand thoughtful, with despatches in his left hand. It was then that I saw in a moment that I had wronged him, and I felt as if I could have gone down on the ground for him to have walked over me, for whatever he might have been in peace, easy-going, careless, and fond of idleness and good-living—

come time for action, there he was with the true British officer flashing out of his face, his lips pinched, his eyes flashing, and a stern look upon his countenance that I had never seen before.

'Now then!' I says in a whisper to Measles. I didn't say anything else, for he knew what I meant. 'Now then—now then!'

'Well,' says Measles then, in a whisper, 'I s'pose women and children will bring the soft out of a man at a time like this; but, cuss him! what did he mean by humbugging us like that!'

I should think Colonel Maine stood alone thoughtful and still in that court-yard, with the sun beating down upon his muslin-covered forage-cap, while you could slowly, and like a pendulum-beat, count thirty. It was a tremendously hot morning, with the sky a bright clear blue, and the shadows of a deep purple black cast down and cut as sharp as sharp. It was so still, too, that you could hear the whirring, whizzing noise of the cricket things, and now and then the champ, champ of the horse rattling his bit as he stood outside the gateway. It was a strange silence, that seemed to make itself felt; and then the colonel woke into life, stuck those despatches into his sword-belt, gave an order here, an order there, and the next minute—Tantaran-tantaran, *Tantaran-tantaran*, TANTARAN-TANTARAN, *Tantaran-tay*—the bugle was ringing out the assemblée, men were hurrying here and there, there was the tramping of feet, the court-yard was full of busy figures, shadows were passing backwards and forwards, and the news was abroad that our regiment was to form a flying column with another, and that we were off directly.

Ay, but it was exciting, that getting ready, and the time went like magic before we formed a hollow square, and the colonel said a few words to us, mounted as he was now, his voice firm as firm, except once, when I saw him glance at an upper window, and then it trembled, but only for an instant. His words were not many; and to this day, when I think of the scene under that hot blue sky, they come ringing back; for it did not seem to us that our old colonel was speaking, but a new man of a different mettle, though it was only that the right stuff had been sleeping in his breast, ready to be wakened by the bugle.

'My lads,' he said, and to a man we all burst out into a ringing cheer, when he took off his cap, and waved it round—'My lads, this is a sharp call, but I've been expecting it, and it has not found us asleep. I thank you for the smart way in which you have answered it, for it shews me that a little easy-going on my part in the piping times of peace has not been taken advantage of. My lads, these are stern times; and this despatch tells me of what will bring the honest British blood into every face, and make every strong hand take a firm gripe of its piece as he longs for the order to charge the mutinous traitors to their Queen, who, taking her pay, sworn to serve her, have turned, and in cold blood butchered their officers, slain women, and hacked to pieces innocent babes. My lads, we are going against a horde of monsters; but I have bad news—you cannot all go!'

There was a murmur here.

'That murmur is not meant,' he continued; 'and I know it will be regretted when I explain myself. We have women here and children: mine—yours—and they must be protected' (it was here that his voice shook). 'Captain Dyer's company will garrison

the place till our return, and to those men many of us leave all that is dear to us on earth. I have spoken. God save the Queen !'

How that place echoed with the hearty 'Hurray!' that rung out; and then it was, 'Fours right. March!' and only our company held firm, while I don't know whether I felt disappointed or pleased, till I happened to look up at one of the windows, to see Mrs Maine and Miss Ross, with those two poor little innocent children clapping their hands with delight at seeing the soldiers march away; one of them, the little girl, with her white muslin and scarlet sash over her shoulder, being held up by Lizzy Green; and then I did know that I was not disappointed, but glad I was to stay.

But to shew you how a man's heart changes about when it is blown by the hot breath of what you may call love, let me tell you that only half a minute later, I was disappointed again at not going; and dared I have left the ranks, I'd have run after the departing column, for I caught Harry Lant looking up at that window, and I thought a handkerchief was waved to him.

Next minute, Captain Dyer calls out, 'Form four—deep. Right face. March!' and he led us to the gateway, but only to halt us there, for Measles, who was sentry, calls out something to him in a wild excited way.

'What do you want, man?' says Captain Dyer.

'O sir, if you'll only let me exchange. 'Taint too late. Let me go, captain.'

'How dare you, sir!' says Captain Dyer sternly, though I could see plainly enough it was only for discipline, for he was, I thought, pleased at Measles wanting to be in the thick of it. Then he shouts again to Measles: 'Tention—present arms!' and Measles falls into his right position for a sentry when troops are marching past. 'March!' says the captain again; and we marched into the market-place, and—all but those told off for sentries—we were dismissed; and Captain Dyer then stood talking earnestly to Lieutenant Leigh, for it had fallen out that they two, with a short company of eight-and-thirty rank and file, were to have the guarding of the women and children left in quarters at Begumbagh.

VII.

It seemed to me that, for the time being, Lieutenant Leigh was too much of a soldier to let private matters and personal feelings of enmity interfere with duty; and those two stood talking together for a good half-hour, when, having apparently made their plans, fatigue-parties were ordered out; and what I remember then thinking was a wise move, the soldiers' wives and children in quarters were brought into the old palace, since it was the only likely spot for putting into something like a state of defence.

I have called it a palace, and I suppose that a rajah did once live in it, but, mind you, it was neither a very large nor a very grand place, being only a square of buildings, facing inward to a little court-yard, entered by a gateway, after the fashion of no end of buildings in the east.

Water we had in the tank, but provisions were brought in, and what sheep there were. Fortunately, there was a good supply of hay, and that we got in; but one thing we did not bargain for, that was the company of the great elephant, *Nabob*, he having

been left behind. And what does he do but come slowly on those india-rubber cushion feet of his, and walk through the gateway, his back actually brushing against the top; and then, once in, he goes quietly over to where the hay was stacked, and coolly enough begins eating!

The men laughed, and some jokes were made about his taking up a deal of room, and I suppose, really, it was through Harry Lant that the great beast came in; but no more was said then, we all being so busy, and not one of us had the sense to see what a fearful strait that great inoffensive animal might bring us to.

I believe we all forgot about the heat that day as we worked on, slaving away at things that, in an ordinary way, we should have expected to be done by the niggers. Food, ammunition, wood, particularly planks, everything Captain Dyer thought likely to be of use; and soon a breastwork was made inside the gateway; such lower windows as looked outwards carefully nailed up, and loopholed for a shot at the enemy, should any appear; and when night did come at last, peaceful and still, the old palace was turned into a regular little fort.

We all knew that all this might be labour in vain, but all the same it seemed to be our duty to get the place into as good a state of defence as we could, and under orders we did it. But, after all, we knew well enough that if the mutineers should bring up a small field-piece, they could knock the place about our ears in no time. Our hope, though, was that, at all events while our regiment was away, we might be unmolested, for, if the enemy came in any number, what could eight-and-thirty men do, hampered as they were with half-a-dozen children, and twice as many women? Not that all the women were likely to hamper us, for there was Mrs Bantem, busy as a bee, working here, comforting there, helping women to make themselves snug in different rooms; and once, as she came near me, she gave me one of her tremendous slaps on the back, her eyes twinkling with pleasure, and the perspiration streaming down her face, the while. 'Ike Smith,' she says, 'this is something like, isn't it? But ask Captain Dyer to have that breastwork strengthened—there isn't half enough of it. Glad Bantem hasn't gone. But, I say, only think of that poor woman! I saw her just now crying, fit to break her poor heart.'

'What poor woman?' I said, staring hard.

'Why, the colonel's wife. Poor soul, it's pitiful to see her! it went through me like a knife.—What! are you there, my pretties?' she cried, flumping down on the stones as the colonel's two little ones came running out. 'Bless your pretty hearts, you'll come and say a word to old Mother Bantem, won't you?'

'What's everybody tying about?' says the little girl, in her prattling way. 'I don't like people to ty. Has my ma been whipped, and Aunt Elsie been naughty?'

'Look, look!' cries the boy excitedly; 'dere's old *Nabob*!' And toddling off, the next minute he was close to the great beast, his little sister running after him, to catch hold of his hand; and there the little mites stood close to, and staring up at the great elephant, as he kept on amusing himself by twisting up a little hay in his trunk, and then lightly scattering it over his back, to get rid of the flies—for what nature could have been about to give him such a scrap of a tail, I can't understand. He'd work it, and flip it about hard enough; but as to getting rid

of a fly, it's my belief that if insects can laugh, they laughed at it, as they watched him from where they were buzzing about the stone walls and windows in the hot sunshine.

The next minute, like a chorus, there came a scream from one of the upper windows, one from another, and a sort of howl from Mrs Bantem, and we all stood startled and staring, for what does Jenny Wren do, but, in a staggering way, lift up her little brother for him to touch the elephant's trunk, and then she stood laughing and clapping her hands with delight, seeing no fear, bless her! as that long, soft trunk was gently curled round the boy's waist, he was drawn out of his sister's arms; and then the great beast stood swinging the child to and fro, now up a little way, now down between his legs, and him crowing and laughing away all the while, as if it was the best fun that could be.

I believe we were all struck motionless; and it was like taking a hand away from my throat to let me breathe once more, when I saw the elephant gently drop the little fellow down on a heap of hay, but only for him to scramble up, and run forward shouting: 'Now 'gain, now 'gain;' and, as if *Nabob* understood his little prattling, half-tied tongue, he takes him up again, and swings him, just as there was a regular rush made, and Mrs Colonel, Miss Ross, Lizzy, and the captain and lieutenant came up.

'For Heaven's sake, save the child!' cries Mrs Maine.—'Mr Leigh, pray, do something.'

Miss Ross did not speak, but she looked at Captain Dyer; and those two young men both went at the elephant directly, to get the child away; but, in an instant, *Nabob* wheeled round, just the same as a stubborn donkey would at home with a lot of boys teasing it; and then, as they dodged round his great carcass, he trumpeted fiercely, and began to shuffle off round the court.

I went up too, and so did Mrs Bantem, brave as a lion; but the great beast only kept on making his loud snorting noise, and shuffled along, with the boy in his trunk, swinging him backwards and forwards; and it was impossible to help thinking of what would be the consequence if the elephant should drop the little fellow, and then set on him one of his great feet.

It seemed as if nothing could be done, and once the idea—wild enough too—rushed into my head that it would be advisable to get a rifle put to the great beast's ear, and fire, when Measles shouted out from where he was on guard: 'Here's Chunder coming!' and, directly after, with his opal eye-balls rolling, and his dark, treacherous-looking face seeming to me all wicked and pleased at what was going on, came the mahout, and said a few words to the elephant, which stopped directly, and went down upon its knees. Chunder then tried to take hold of the child, but somehow that seemed to make the great beast furious, and, getting up again, he began to grunt and make a noise after the fashion of a great pig, going on now faster round the court, and sending those who had come to look, and who stood in his way, fleeing in all directions.

Mrs Maine was half fainting, and, catching the little girl to her breast, I saw her go down upon her knees and hide her face, expecting, no doubt, every moment, that the next one would be her boy's last; and, indeed, we were all alarmed now, for the more we tried to get the little chap away, the fiercer the elephant grew; the only one who did not seem to mind being the boy himself, though his sister now began to cry, and in her little artless way I heard her ask her mother if the naughty elephant would eat Clivey.

I've often thought since that if we'd been quiet, and left the beast alone, he would soon have set the child down; and I've often thought, too, that Mr Chunder could have got the boy away if he had liked, only he did nothing but tease and irritate the elephant, which was not the best of friends with him. But you will easily understand that there was not much time for thought then.

I had been doing my best along with the others, and then stood thinking what I could be at next, when I caught Lizzy Green's eye turned to me in an appealing, reproachful sort of way, that seemed to say as plainly as could be: 'Can't you do anything?' when all at once Measles shouts out: 'Arry, Arry!' and Harry Lant came up at the double, having been busy carrying arms out of the guard-room rack.

It was at one and the same moment that Harry Lant saw what was wrong, and that a cold dull chill ran through me, for I saw Lizzy clasp her hands together in a sort of thankful way, and it seemed to me then, as Harry ran up to the elephant, that he was always to be put before me, and that I was nobody, and the sooner I was out of the way the better.

All the same, though, I couldn't help admiring the way Harry ran up to the great brute, and did what none of us could manage. I quite hated him, I know, but yet I was proud of my mate, as he went up and says something to *Nabob*, and the elephant stands still. 'Put him down,' says Harry, pointing to the ground; and the great flesh-mountain puts the little fellow down. 'Now then,' says Harry, to the horror of the ladies, 'pick him up again;' and in a twinkling the great thing whips the boy up once more. 'Now, bring him up to the colonel's lady.' Well, if you'll believe me, if the great thing didn't follow Harry like a lamb, and carry the child up to where, half fainting, knelt poor Mrs Maine. 'Now, put him down,' says Harry; and the next moment little Clive Maine—Cock Robin, as we called him—was being hugged to his mother's breast. 'Now, go down on your knees, and beg the ladies' pardon,' says Harry laughing. Down goes the elephant, and stops there, making a queer chuntering noise the while. 'Says he's very sorry, ma'am, and won't do so no more,' says Harry, serious as a judge; and in a moment, half laughing, half crying, Mrs Maine caught hold of Harry's hand, and kissed it, and then held it for a moment to her breast, sobbing hysterically as she did so.

'God bless you! You're a good man,' she cried; and then she broke down altogether; and Miss Ross, and Mrs Bantem, and Lizzy got round her, and helped her in.

I could see that Harry was touched, for one of his lips shook; but he tried to keep up the fun of the thing; and turning to the elephant, he says out loud: 'Now, get up, and go back to the hay; and don't you come no more of those games, that's all.'

The elephant got up directly, making a grunting noise as he did so.

'Why not?' says Harry, making-believe that that was what the great beast said. 'Because, if you do, I'll smash you. There!'

Officers and men, they all burst out laughing, to see little Harry Lant—a chap so little that he wouldn't have been in the regiment only that men were scarce, and the standard was very low when he listed—to see him standing shaking his fist at the great monster, one of whose legs was bigger than Harry altogether—stand shaking his fist in its face, and then take hold of the soft trunk and lead him away.

Perhaps I did, perhaps I didn't, but I thought I caught sight of a glance passing between Lizzy Green, now at one window, and Harry, leading off the elephant; but all the same I felt that jealous of him, and to hate him so that I could have quarrelled with

him about nothing. It seemed as if he was always to come before me in everything.

And I wasn't the only one jealous of Harry, for no sooner was the court pretty well empty, than he came slowly up towards me, in spite of my sour black looks, which he wouldn't notice; but before he could get to me, Chunder Chow, the mahout, goes up to the elephant, muttering and spiteful-like, with his hook-spear thing, that mahouts use to drive with; and being, I suppose, put out, and jealous, and annoyed at his authority being taken away, and another man doing what he couldn't, he gives the elephant a kick in the leg, and then hits him viciously with his iron hook thing.

Lord bless you! it didn't take an instant, and it seemed to me that the elephant only gave that trunk of his a gentle swing against Chunder's side, and he was a couple of yards off, rolling over and over in the hay scattered about.

Up he jumps, wild as wild; and the first thing he catches sight of is Harry laughing fit to crack his sides, when Chunder rushes at him like a mad bull.

I suppose he expected to see Harry turn tail and run; but that being one of those things not included in drill, and a British soldier having a good deal of the machine about him, Harry stands fast, and Chunder pulls up short, grinning, rolling his eyes, and twisting his hands about, just for all the world like as if he was robbing a hen-roost, and wringing all the chickens' necks.

'Didn't hurt much, did it, blacky?' says Harry coolly. But the mahout couldn't speak for rage; but he kept spitting on the ground, and making signs, till really his face was anything but pretty to look at. And there he kept on, till, from laughing, Harry turned a bit nasty, for there was some one looking out of a window; and from being half-amused at what was going on, I once more felt all cold and bitter. But Harry fires up now, and makes towards Mr Chunder, who begins to retreat; and says Harry: 'Now I tell you what it is, young man; I never did you any ill turn; and if I choose to have a bit of fun with the elephant, it's government property, and as much mine as yours. But look ye here—if you come cussing, and spitting, and swearing at me again in your nasty heathen dialect, why, if I don't—No,' he says, stopping short, and half-turning to me, 'I can't black his eyes, Isaac, for they're black enough already; but let him come any more of it, and, jigger-maree, if I don't bung 'em!'

VIII.

Chunder didn't like the looks of Harry, I suppose, so he walked off, turning once to spit and curse, like that turn-coat chap, Shimei, that you read of in the Bible; and we two walked off together towards our quarters.

'I ain't going to stand any of his nonsense,' says Harry.

'It's bad making enemies now, Harry,' I said gruffly. And just then up comes Measles, who had been relieved, for his spell was up now, and another party were on, else he would have had to be in the guard-room.

'There never was such an unlucky beggar as me,' says Measles. 'If a chance does turn up for earning a bit of promotion, it's always some one else gets it. Come on, lads, and let's see what Mother Bantem's got in the pot.'

'You'll perhaps have a chance before long of earning your bit of promotion without going out,' I says.

'Ike Smith's turned prophet and croaker in orrany,' says Harry, laughing. 'I believe he expects we're going to have a new siege of Seringapatam here, only back'ards way on.'

'Only wish some of 'em would come this way,' says Measles grimly; and he made a sort of offer, and a hit out at some imaginary enemy.

'Here they are,' says Joe Bantem, as we walked in. 'Curry for dinner, lads—look alive.'

'What, my little hero!' says Mrs Bantem, fetching Harry one of her slaps on the back. 'My word, you're in fine plumage with the colonel's lady.'

Slap came her hand down again on Harry's back; and as soon as he could get wind: 'Oh, I say, don't,' says Harry. 'Thank goodness, I ain't a married man.—Is she often as affectionate as this with you, Joe?'

Joe Bantem laughed; and soon after we were all making, in spite of threatened trouble and disappointment, an uncommonly hearty dinner, for, if there ever was a woman who could make a good curry, it was Mrs Bantem; and many's the cold winter's day I've stood in Facet's door there in Bond Street, and longed for a plateful. Pearls stewed in sunshine, Harry Lant used to call it; and really to see the beautiful, glistening, white rice, every grain tender as tender, and yet dry and ready to roll away from the others—none of your mosh-posh rice, if Mrs Bantem boiled it—and then the rich golden curry itself: there, I've known that woman turn one of the toughest old native cocks into what you'd have sworn was a delicate young Dorking chick—that is, so long as you didn't get hold of a drumstick, which perhaps would be a bit ropy. That woman was a regular blessing to our mess, and we fellows said so, many a time.

One, two, three days passed without any news, and we in our quarters were quiet as if thousands of miles from the rest of the world. The town kept as deserted as ever, and it seemed almost startling to me when I was posted sentry on the roof, after looking out over the wide, sandy, dusty plain, over which the sunshine was quivering and dancing, to peer down amongst the little ramshackle native huts without a sign of life amongst them, and it took but little thought for me to come to the conclusion that the natives knew of something terrible about to happen, and had made that their reason for going away. Though, all the same, it might have been from dread lest we should seek to visit upon them and their horrors that had elsewhere befallen the British.

I used often to think, too, that Captain Dyer had some such feelings as mine, for he looked very, very serious and anxious, and he'd spend hours on the roof with his glass, Miss Ross often being by his side, while Lieutenant Leigh used to watch them in a strange way, when he thought no one was observing him.

I've often thought that when people get touched with that queer complaint folks call love, they get into a curious half-delirious way, that makes them fancy that people are nearly blind, and have their eyes shut to what they do or say. I fancy there was something of this kind with Miss Ross, and I'm sure there was with me when I used to go hanging about, trying to get a word with Lizzy; and, of course, shut up as we all were then, often having the chance, but getting seldom anything but a few cold answers, and a sort of show of fear of me whenever I was near to her.

But what troubled me as much as anything, was the behaviour of the four Indians we had shut up with us—Chunder Chow, the old black nurse, and two more—for they grew more uppish and bounceable every day, refusing to work, until Captain Dyer had one of the men tied up to the triangles and flogged, down in a great cellar or vault place that there was under the north end of the palace, so that the ladies and women shouldn't hear his cries. He deserved all he got, as I can answer for, and that made the rest a little more civil, but not for long; and, just the day before something happened, I took

the liberty of saluting Captain Dyer, after he had been giving me some orders, and took that chance of speaking my mind.

'Captain,' I says, 'I don't think those black folks are to be trusted.'

'Neither do I, Smith,' he says. 'But what have you to tell me?'

'Nothing at all, captain, only that I have my eye on them; and I've been thinking that they must somehow or another have held communication outside; and I don't like it, for those people don't get what we call cheeky without cause.'

'Keep both eyes on them then, Smith,' says Captain Dyer, smiling; 'and, no matter what it is—if it is the most trivial thing in any way connected with them, report it.'

'I will, sir,' I says; and the very next day, much against the grain, I did have something to report.

IX.

The next morning was hotter, I think, than ever, with no prospect either of rain or change; and, after doing what little work I had to get over, it struck me that I might as well attend to what Captain Dyer advised—give two eyes to Chunder and his friends; so I left Mrs Bantem busy over her cooking, and went down into the court.

All below was as still as death—sunshine here, shadow there; but, through one of the windows, open to catch the least breeze that might be on the way, and taking in instead the hot, sultry air, came now and then the silvery laughter of the children—that pleasant cheery sound that makes the most rugged old face grow a trifle smoother.

I looked here, and I looked there, but could only see old *Nabob* amusing himself with the hay, a sentry on the roof to the east, and another on the roof to the west, and one in the gateway, broiling almost, all of them, with the heat.

The ladies and the children were seldom seen now, for they were in trouble; and Mrs Maine was worn almost to skin and bone with anxiety, as she sat waiting for tidings of the expedition.

Not knowing what to do with myself, I sauntered along by where there was a slip of shade, and entered the south side of the palace—an old half-ruinous part; and after going first into one, and then into another of the bare empty rooms, I picked out what seemed to be the coolest corner I could find, sat down with my back propped against the wall, filled and lit my pipe, and then putting things together in my mind, thoroughly enjoyed a good smoke.

There was something wonderfully soothing in that bit of tobacco, and it appeared to me cooling, comforting, and to make my bit of a love-affair seem not so bad as it was. So, on the strength of that, I refilled, and was about half-way through another pipe, when things began to grow very dim round about me, and I was wandering about in my dreams, and nodding that head of mine in the most curious and wild way you can think of. What I dreamed about most was about getting married to Lizzy Green; and in what must have been a very short space, that event was coming off at least half-a-dozen times over, only *Nabob*, the elephant, would come in at an awkward time and put a stop to it. But at last, in my dreamy fashion, it seemed to me that matters were smoothed over, and he consented to put down the child, and, flapping his ears, promised he'd say yes. But in my stupid, confused muddle, I thought that he'd no sooner put down the child with his trunk than he wheeled round and took him up with his tail; and so on, backwards and forwards, when, getting quite out of patience, I caught Lizzy's hand in mine, saying: 'Never mind the elephant—let's have it over;' and she gave a sharp scream.

I jumped to my feet, biting off and swallowing a bit of pipe-shank as I did so, and then stood drenched with perspiration, listening to a scuffling noise in the next room; when, shaking off the stupid confused feeling, I ran towards the door just as another scream—not a loud, but a faint excited scream—rang in my ears, and the next moment Lizzy Green was sobbing and crying in my arms, and that black thief Chunder was crawling on his hands and knees to the door, where he got up, holding his fist to his mouth, and then he turned upon me such a look as I have never forgotten.

I don't wonder at the people of old painting devils with black faces, for I don't know anything more devilish-looking than a black's phiz when it is drawn with rage, and the eyes are rolling about, now all black flash, now all white, while the grinning ivories below seem to be grinding and ready to tear you in pieces.

It was after that fashion that Chunder looked at me as he turned at the door; but I was then only thinking of the trembling, frightened girl I held in my arms, trying at the same time to whisper a few gentle words, while I had hard work to keep from pressing my lips to her white forehead.

But the next minute she disengaged herself from my grasp, and held out her little white hand to me, thanking me as sweetly as thanks could be given.

'Perhaps you had better not say a word about it,' she whispered. 'He's come under pretence of seeing the nurse, and been rude to me once or twice before. I came here to sit at that window with my work, and did not see him come behind me.'

I started as she spoke about that open window, for it looked out upon the spot where I sometimes stood sentry; but then, Harry Lant sometimes stood just in the same place, and I don't know whether it was a strange impression caused by his coming, that made me think of him, but just then there were footsteps, and, with his pipe in his mouth, and fatigue-jacket all unbuttoned, Harry entered the room.

'Beg pardon; didn't know it was engaged,' he says lightly, as he stepped back; and then he stopped, for Lizzy called to him by his name.

'Please walk back with me to Mrs Maine's quarters,' she said softly; and once more holding her hand out to me, with her eyes cast down, she thanked me; and the question I had been asking myself—Did she love Harry Lant better than me?—was to my mind answered, and I gave a groan as I saw them walk off together, for it struck me then that they had engaged to meet in that room, only Harry Lant was late.

'Never mind,' I says to myself; 'I've done a comrade a good turn.' And then I thought more and more of there being a feeling in the blacks' minds that their day was coming, or that ill-looking scoundrel would never have dared to insult a white woman in open day.

Ten minutes after, I was on my way to Captain Dyer, for, in spite of what Lizzy had said, I felt that, being under orders, it was my duty to report all that occurred with the blacks; for we might at any time have been under siege, and to have had unknown and treacherous enemies in the camp would have been ruin indeed.

'Well, Smith,' he said, smiling as I entered and saluted, 'what news of the enemy?'

'Not much, sir,' I said; 'what I had to tell, going, as I have before said, very much against the grain. I was in one of the empty rooms on the south side, when I heard a scream, and running up, I found it was Miss Ross.'

'What!' he roared, in a voice that would have startled a stronger man than I.

'Miss Ross's maid, sir, with that black fellow Chunder, the mahout, trying to kiss her.'

'Well,' he said, with a black angry look over-spreading his face.

'Well, sir,' I said, feeling quite red as I spoke, 'he kissed my fist instead—that's all.'

Captain Dyer began to walk up and down, playing with one of the buttons on his breast, as was his way when eager and excited.

'Now, Smith,' he said at last, stopping short before me, 'what does that mean?'

'Mean, sir?' I said, feeling quite as excited as himself. 'Well, sir, if you ask me, I say that if it was in time of peace and quiet, it would only mean that it was a bit of his damned black—I beg your pardon, captain,' I says, stopping short, for, you see, it was quite time.

'Go on, Smith,' he said quietly.

'His black impudence, sir.'

'But, as it is not in time of peace and quiet, Smith?' he said, looking me through and through.

'Well, sir,' I said, 'I don't want to croak, nor for other people to believe what I say; but it seems to me that that black fellow's kicking out of the ranks means a good deal; and I take it that he is excited with the news that he has somehow got hold of—news that is getting into his head like so much green 'rack. I've thought of it some little time now, sir; and it strikes me that if, instead of our short company being Englishmen, they were all Chunder Chows, before to-morrow morning, begging your pardon, Captain Dyer and Lieutenant Leigh would have said "Right wheel!" for the last time.'

'And the women and children!' he muttered softly: but I heard him.

He did not speak then for quite half a minute, when he turned to me with a pleasant smile.

'But you see, though, Smith,' he said, 'our short company is made up of different stuff; and therefore there's some hope for us yet; but—Ah, Leigh, did you hear what he said?'

'Yes,' said the lieutenant, who had been standing at the door for a few moments, scowling at us both.

'Well, what do you think?' said Captain Dyer.

'Think?' said Lieutenant Leigh contemptuously, as he turned away—'nothing!'

'But,' said Captain Dyer quietly, 'really I think there is much truth in what he, an observant man, says.'

There was a challenge from the roof just then; and we all went out to find that a mounted man was in sight; and on the captain making use of his glass, I heard him tell Lieutenant Leigh that it was an orderly dragoon.

A few minutes after, it was plain enough to everybody; and soon, man and horse dead beat, the orderly with a despatch trotted into the court.

It was a sight worth seeing, to look upon Mrs Maine clutching at the letter enclosed for her in Captain Dyer's despatch. Poor woman! it was a treasure to her—one that made her pant as she hurriedly snatched it from the captain's hand, for all formality was forgotten in those days; and then she hurried away to where her sister was waiting to hear the news.

X.

The orderly took back a despatch from Captain Dyer, starting at daybreak the next morning; but before then, we all knew that matters were getting to wear a terrible aspect. At first, I had been disposed to think that the orderly was romancing, and giving us a few travellers' tales; but I soon found out that he was in earnest; and more than once I felt a shiver as he sat with our mess, telling us of how regiment after regiment had mutinied and murdered their officers; how station after station had been plundered, collectors butchered, and their wives and

daughters sometimes cut down, sometimes carried off by the wretches, who had made a sport of throwing infants from one to the other on their bayonets.

'I never had any children,' sobbed Mrs Bantem then; 'and I never wished to have any; for they're not right for soldiers' wives; but only to think—the poor sweet, suffering little things. Oh, if I'd only been a man, and been there!'

We none of us said anything; but I believe all thought as I did, that if Mrs Bantem had been there, she'd have done as much—ah, perhaps more—than some men would have done. Bless my soul! as I think of it, and recall it from the bygone, there I can see Mother Bantem—though why we called her mother, I don't know, unless it was because she was like a mother to us—with her great strapping form; and think of the way in which she—

Halt! Retire by fours from the left.

Just in time; for I find handling my pen's like handling a commander-in-chief's staff, and that I've got letters which make words, which make phrases, which make sentences, which make paragraphs, which make chapters, which make up the whole story; and that is for all the world like the army with its privates made into companies, and battalions, and regiments, and brigades. Well, there you are: if you don't have discipline, and every private in his right place, where are you? Just so with me; my words were coming out in the wrong places, and in another minute I should have spoiled my story, by letting you know what was coming at the wrong time.

Well, we all felt very deeply the news brought in by that orderly, for soldiers are not such harum-scarum roughs as some people seem to imagine. For the most part, they're men with the same feelings as civilians; and I don't think many of us slept very sound that night, feeling as we did what a charge we had, and that we might be attacked at any time; and a good deal of my anxiety was on account of Lizzy Green; for even if she wouldn't be my wife, but Harry Lant's, I could not help taking a wonderful deal of interest in her.

But all the same it was a terribly awkward time, as you must own, for falling in love; and I don't know hardly whom I pitied most, Captain Dyer or myself; but think I had more leanings towards number one, because Captain Dyer was happy; though, perhaps, I might have been; only like lots more hot sighing noodles, I never once thought of asking the girl if she'd have me. As for Lieutenant Leigh, I never once thought of giving him a bit of pity, for I did not think he deserved it.

Well, the trooper started off at daybreak, so as to get well on his journey in the early morning; and about an hour after he was gone, I had a fancy to go into the old ruined room again, where there was the bit of a scene I've told you of. My orders from Captain Dyer were, to watch Chunder strictly, both as to seeing that he did not again insult any of the women, and also to see if he had any little game of his own that he was playing on the sly; for though Lieutenant Leigh, on being told, pooh-poohed it all, and advised a flogging, Captain Dyer had his suspicions—stronger ones, it seemed, than mine; and hence my orders and my being excused from mounting guard.

It was all very still, and cool, and quiet as I walked from room to room, slowly and thoughtfully, stopping to pick up my broken pipe, which lay where I had dropped it; and then going on into the next room, where, under the window, lay the bit of cotton cobweb and cat's-cradle work Lizzy had been doing, and had left behind. I gave a bit of a gulp as I picked that up, and I was tucking it inside my jacket when I stopped short, for I thought I heard a whisper.

I listened, and there it was again—a low, earnest whispering of first one and then another voice in the

next room, whose wide broken doorway stood open, for there wasn't a bit of woodwork left.

I have heard about people saying, that in some great surprise or fright, their hearts stood still; but I don't believe it, because it always strikes me that, when a person's heart does stand still, it never goes on again. All the same, though, my heart felt then as if it did stand still with the dead, dull, miserable feeling that came upon me. Only to think that on this, the second time, I had come through these ruined rooms, and they were here again! It was plain enough Harry Lant and Lizzy made this their meeting-place, and only they knew how many times they'd met before.

Time back, I could have laughed at the idea of me, a great strapping fellow, feeling as I did; but now I felt very wretched; and as I thought of Harry Lant kissing those bright red lips, and looking into those deep dark eyes, and being let pass his hand over the glossy hair, with the prospect of some day calling it all his own, I did not burn all over with a mad rage and passion, but it was like a great grief coming upon me, so that, if it hadn't been for being a man, I could have sat down and cried.

I should think ten minutes passed, and the whispering still went on, when I said to myself: 'Be a man, Isaac; if she likes him better, hasn't she a right to her pick?' But still I felt very miserable as I turned to go away, when a something, said a little louder than the rest, stopped me.

'That ain't English,' I says to myself. 'What! surely she's not listening to that black scoundrel?'

I was red-hot then in a moment; and as to thinking whether this or that was straightforward, or whether I was playing the spy, or anything of that sort, such an idea never came into my head. Chunder was evidently talking to Lizzy Green in that room; and for a few seconds I felt blind with a sort of jealous savage rage—against her, mind, now; and going on tip-toe, I looked round the doorway, so as to see as well as hear.

I was back in an instant, with a fresh set of sensations busy in my breast. It was Chunder, but he was alone; there was no Lizzy there; and I don't know whether my heart beat then for joy at knowing it, or for shame at myself for having thought such a thing of her.

What did it mean, then?

I did not have to ask myself the question twice, for the answer came—Treachery! And stealing to the slit of window in the room I was in, I peeped cautiously out in time to see Chunder throwing out what looked like a white packet. I could see his arm move as he threw it down to a man in a turban—a dark wiry-looking rascal; and in those few seconds I seemed to read that packet word for word, though no doubt the writing was in one of the native dialects, and my reading of it was, that it was a correct list of the defenders of the place, the women and children, and what arms and ammunition there were stored up.

It was all plain enough, and the villain was sending it by a man who must have brought him tidings of some kind.

What was I to do? That man ought to be stopped at all hazards; and what I ought to have done was to steal back, give the alarm, and let a party go round to try and cut him off.

That's what I ought to have done; but I never did have much judgment.

Now for what I did do.

Slipping back from the window, I went cautiously to the doorway, and entered the old room where Chunder was standing at the window; and I went in so quietly, and he was so intent, that I had crept close, and was in the act of leaping on to him before he turned round and tried to avoid me.

He was too late, though, for with a bound I was on

him, pinioning his hands, and holding him down on the window-sill, with his head half out, as bearing down upon him, I leaned out as far as I could, yelling out:

'Sentry in the next roof, mark man below. Stop him, or fire.'

The black fellow below drew a long, awkward-looking pistol, and aimed at me, but only for a moment. Perhaps he was afraid of killing Chunder, for the next instant he had stuck the pistol back in his calico belt, and, with head stooped, was running as hard as he could run, when I could hardly contain myself for rage, knowing as I did how important it was for him to have been stopped.

'Bang!'

A sharp report from the roof, and the fellow made a bound.

Was he hit?

No: he only seemed to run the faster.

'Bang!'

Another report as the runner came in sight of the second sentry.

But I saw no more, for all my time was taken up with Chunder; for as the second shot rang out, he gave a heave, and nearly sent me through the open window.

It was by a miracle almost that I saved myself from breaking my neck, for it was a good height from the ground; but I held on to him tightly with a clutch such as he never had on his arms and neck before; and then, with a strength for which I shouldn't have given him credit, he tussled with me, now tugging to get away, now to throw me from the window, his hot breath beating all the time upon my cheeks, and his teeth grinning, and eyes rolling savagely.

It was only a spurt, though, and I soon got the better of him.

I don't want to boast, but I suppose our cold northern bone and muscle are tougher and stronger than theirs; and at the end of five minutes, puffing and blown, I was sitting on his chest, taking a paper from inside his calico.

That laid me open; for, like a flash, I saw then that he had a knife in one hand, while before another thought could pass through my mind, it was sticking through my jacket and the skin of my ribs, and my fist was driven down against his mouth for him to kiss for the second time in his life.

Next minute, Captain Dyer and a dozen men were in the room, Chunder was handcuffed and marched off, and the captain was eagerly questioning me.

'But is that fellow shot down or taken—the one outside?' I asked.

'Neither,' said Captain Dyer; 'and it is too late now: he has got far enough away.'

Then I told him what I had seen, and he looked at the packet, his brow knitting as he tried to make it out.

'I ought to have come round, and given the alarm, captain,' I said bitterly.

'Yes, my good fellow, you ought,' he said; 'and I ought to have had that black scoundrel under lock and key days ago. But it is too late now to talk of what ought to have been done; we must talk of what there is to do.—But are you hurt?'

'He sent his knife through my jacket, sir,' I said, 'but it's only a scratch on the skin;' and fortunately that's what it proved to be, for we had no room for wounded men, since we should have them soon enough.

XL.

An hour of council, and then another—our two leaders not seeming to agree as to the extent of the coming danger. Challenge from the west roof:

'Orderly in sight.'

Sure enough, a man on horseback riding very slowly, and as if his horse was dead beat.

'Surely it isn't that poor fellow come back, because his horse has failed? He ought to have walked on,' said Captain Dyer.

'Same man,' said Lieutenant Leigh, looking through his glass; and before very long, the poor fellow who had gone away at daybreak rode slowly up to the gate, was admitted, and then had to be helped from his horse, giving a great sobbing groan as it was done.

'In here, quick!' I said, for I thought I heard the ladies' voices; and we carried him in to where Mrs Bantem was, as usual, getting ready for dinner, and there we laid him on a mattress.

'Despatches, captain,' he says, holding up the captain's letter to Colonel Maine. 'They didn't get that. They were too many for me. I dropped one, though, with my pistol, and cut my way through the others.'

As he spoke, I untwisted his leather sword-knot, which was cutting into his wrist, for his hacked and blood-stained sabre was hanging from his hand.

'Wouldn't go back into the scabbard,' he said faintly; and then with a harsh gasp: 'Water—water!'

He revived then a bit; and as Captain Dyer and Mrs Bantem between them were attending to, and binding up his wounds, he told us how he had been set upon ten miles off, and been obliged to fight his way back; and, poor chap, he had fought; for there were no less than ten lance-wounds in his arms, thighs, and chest, from a slight prick up to a horrible gash, deep and long enough, it seemed to me, to let out half-a-dozen poor fellows' souls.

Just in the middle of it, I saw Captain Dyer start and look strange, for there was a shadow came across where we were kneeling; and the next instant he was standing between Miss Ross and the wounded man.

'Pray, go, dear Elsie; this is no place for you,' I heard him whisper to her.

'Indeed, Lawrence,' she whispered, 'am I not a soldier's daughter? I ought to say this is no place for you. Go, and make your arrangements for our defence.'

I don't think any one but me saw the look of love she gave him as she took sponge and lint from his hand, pressing it as she did so, and then her pale face lit up with a smile as she met his eyes; the next moment she was kneeling by the wounded trooper, and in a quiet firm way helping Mrs Bantem, in a manner that made her, poor woman, stare with astonishment.

'God bless you, my darling,' she whispered to her, as soon as they had done, and the poor fellow was lying still—a toss-up with him whether it should be death or life; and I saw Mrs Bantem take Miss Ross's soft white hand between her two great rough hard palms, and kiss it just once.

'And I'd always been abusing and running her down for a fine madam, good for nothing but to squeak songs, and be looked at,' Mrs Bantem said to me, a little while after. 'Why, Isaac Smith, we shall be having that little maid shewing next that there's something in her.'

'And why not?' I said gruffly.

'Ah, to be sure,' says she, with a comical look out of one eye; 'why not? But, Isaac, my lad,' she said sadly, and looking at me very earnestly, 'I'm afraid there's sore times coming; and if so, God in heaven help those poor bairns! Oh, if I'd been a man, and been there!' she cried, as she recollected what the trooper had told us; and she shook her fist fiercely in the air. 'It's what I always did say: soldiers' wives have no business to have children; and it's rank cruelty to the poor little things to bring them into the world.'

Mrs Bantem then went off to see to her patient, while I walked into the court, wondering what would come next, and whether, in spite of all the little bitterness and grumbling, everybody, now some of the stern realities of life were coming upon us, would shew up the bright side of his or her nature; and somehow I got very hopeful that they would.

I felt just then that I should have much liked to have a few words with Lizzy Green, but I had no chance, for it was a busy time with us. Captain Dyer felt strongly enough his responsibility, and not a minute did he lose in doing all he could for our defence; so that after an anxious day, with nothing more occurring, when I looked round at what had been done in barricading and so on, it seemed to me, speaking as a soldier, that, as far as I could judge, there was nothing more to be done, though still the feeling would come home to me that it was a great place for forty men to defend, if attacked by any number. Captain Dyer must have seen that, for he had arranged to have a sort of citadel at the north end by the gateway, and this was to be the last refuge, where all the ammunition and food and no end of chatties of water were stowed down in the great vault-place, which went under this part of the building and a good deal of the court. Then the watch was set, trebled this time, on roof and at window, and we waited impatiently for the morning. Yes, we all of us, I believe, waited impatiently for the morning, when I think, if we had known all that was to come, we should have knelt down and prayed for the darkness to keep on hour after hour, for days, and weeks, and months, sooner than the morning should have broke as it did upon a rabble of black faces, some over white clothes, some over the British uniform that they had disgraced; and as I, who was on the west roof, heard the first hum of their coming, and caught the first glimpse of the ragged column, I gave the alarm, setting my teeth hard as I did so; for, after many years of soldiering, I was now for the first time to see a little war in earnest.

Captain Dyer's first act on the alarm being given was to double the guard over the three blacks, now secured in the strongest room he could find, the black nurse being well looked after by the women. Then, quick almost as thought, every man was at the post already assigned to him; the women and children were brought into the corner rooms by the gates, and then we waited excitedly for what should follow. The captain now ordered me out of the little party under a sergeant, and made me his orderly, and so it happened that always being with or about him, I knew how matters were going on, and was always carrying the orders, now to Lieutenant Leigh, now to this sergeant or that corporal; but at the first offset of the defence of the old place, there was a dispute between captain and lieutenant; and I'm afraid it was maintained by the last out of obstinacy, and just at a time when there should have been nothing but pulling together for the sake of all concerned. I must say, though, that there was right on both sides.

Lieutenant Leigh put it forward as his opinion that, short of men as we were, it was folly to keep four enemies under the same roof, who were likely at any time to overpower the one or two sentries placed over them; while, if there was nothing to fear in that way, there was still the necessity of shortening our defensive forces by a couple of valuable men.

'What would you do with them, then?' said Captain Dyer.

'Set them at liberty,' said Lieutenant Leigh.

'I grant all you say, in the first place,' said the captain; 'but our retaining them is a sheer necessity.'

'Why?' said Lieutenant Leigh, with a sneer; and I must say that at first I held with him.

'Because,' said the captain sternly, 'if we set them at liberty, we increase our enemies' power, not merely

with three men, but with scoundrels who can give them the fullest information of our defences, over and above that of which I am afraid they are already possessed. The matter will not bear further discussion.—Lieutenant Leigh, go now to your post, and do your duty to the best of your power."

Lieutenant Leigh did not like this, and he frowned; but Captain Dyer was his superior officer, and it was his duty to obey, so of course he did.

Now, our position was such, that, say, a hundred men with a field-piece could have knocked a wing in, and then carried us by assault with ease; but though our enemies were full two hundred and fifty, and many of them drilled soldiers, pieces you may say of a great machine, fortunately for us, there was no one to put that machine together, and set it in motion. We soon found that out, for, instead of making the best of things, and taking possession of buildings—sheds and huts—here and there, from which to annoy us, they came up in a mob to the gate, and one fellow on a horse—a native chief, he seemed to be—gave his sword a wave, and half-a-dozen sowars round him did the same, and then they called to us to surrender.

Captain Dyer's orders were to act entirely on the defensive, and to fire no shot till we had orders, leaving them to commence hostilities.

'For,' said he, speaking to all the men, 'it may be a cowardly policy with such a mutinous set in front of us, but we have the women and children to think of; therefore, our duty is to hold the foe at bay, and when we do fire, to make every shot tell. Beating them off is, I fear, impossible, but we may keep them out till help comes.'

'Wouldn't it be advisable, sir, to try and send off another despatch?' I said; 'there's the trooper's horse.'

'Where?' said Captain Dyer, with a smile. 'That has already been thought of, Smith; and Sergeant Jones, the only good horseman we have, went off at two o'clock, and by this time is, I hope, out of danger.—Good heavens! what does that mean?' he said, using his glass.

It was curious that I should have thought of such a thing just then, at a time when four sowars led up Sergeant Jones tied by a piece of rope to one of their saddle-bows, while the trooper's horse was behind.

Captain Dyer would not shew, though, that he was put out by the failure of that hope: he only passed the word for the men to stand firm, and then sent me with a message to Mrs Colonel Maine, requesting that every one might keep right away from the windows, as the enemy might open fire at any time.

He was quite right, for just as I knocked at Mrs Maine's door, a regular squandering, scattering fire began, and you could hear the bullets striking the wall with a sharp pat, bringing down showers of white lime-dust and powdered stone.

I found Mrs Maine seated on the floor with her children, pale and trembling, the little things the while laughing and playing over some pictures. Miss Ross was leaning over her sister, and Lizzy Green was waiting to give the children something else when they were tired of the pictures.

As the rattle of the musketry began, it was soon plain enough to see who had the stoutest hearts; but I seemed to be noticing nothing, though I did a great deal, and listened to Mrs Bantem's voice in the next room, bullying and scolding a woman for crying out loud and upsetting everybody else.

I gave my message, and then Miss Ross asked me if any one was hurt, to which I answered as cheerfully as could be that we were all right as yet; and then, taking myself off, Lizzy Green came with me to the door, and I held out my hand to say 'good-bye,' for I knew it was possible I might never see her again. She gave me her hand, and said 'Good-bye,' in a faltering sort of way, and it seemed to me that she

shrank from me. The next instant, though, there was the rattling crash of the firing, and I knew now that our men were answering.

XII.

As I went down into the court-yard, I found the smoke rising in puffs as our men fired over the breastwork at the mob coming at the gate. Captain Dyer in the thick of it the while, going from man to man, warning them to keep themselves out of sight, and to aim low.

'Take care of yourselves, my lads. I value every one of you at a hundred of those black scoundrels.—Tut, tut, whose that down?'

'Corporal Bray,' says some one.

'Here, Emson, Smith, both of you lend a hand here: we'll make Bantem's quarters hospital.—Now then, look alive, ambulance party.'

We were about lifting the poor fellow, who had sunk down behind the breastwork, all doubled up like, hands and knees; and head down; but as we touched him, he straightened himself out, and looked up at Captain Dyer.

'Don't touch me yet,' he says in a whisper. 'My stripes for some one, captain. Do for Isaac Smith there. Hooray!' he says faintly; and he took off his cap with one hand, gave it a bit of a wave—'God save the Queen'—

'Bear him carefully to the empty ground floor, south side,' says Captain Dyer sternly; 'and make haste back, my lads: moments are precious.'

'I'll do that with Private Manning's wife,' says a voice; and turning as we were going to lift our dead comrade, there was big, strapping Mrs Bantem, and another soldier's wife, and she then said a few words to the captain.

'Gone?' says Captain Dyer.

'Quarter of an hour ago, sir,' says Mrs Bantem; and then to me: 'Poor trooper, Isaac!'

'Another man here,' says Captain Dyer.—'No, not you, Smith.—Fill up here, Bantem.'

Joe Bantem waved his hand to his wife, and took the dead corporal's place, but not easily, for Measles, who was next man, was stepping into it, when Captain Dyer ordered him back.

'But there's such a much better chance of dropping one of them mounted chaps, sir,' says Measles grumblingly.

'Hold your tongue, sir, and go back to your own loophole,' says Captain Dyer; and the way that Measles kept on loading and firing, ramming down his cartridges viciously, and then taking long and careful aim, ah! and with good effect, too, was a sight to see.

All the while, we were expecting an assault, but none came, for the mutineers fell fast, and did not seem to dare to make a rush while we kept up such practice.

Then I had to go round and ask Lieutenant Leigh to send six more men to the gate, and to bring news of what was going on round the other sides.

I found the lieutenant standing at the window where I caught Chunder, and there was a man each at all the other four little windows which looked down at the outside—all the others, as I have said, looking in upon the court.

The lieutenant's men had a shot now and then at any one who approached; but the mutineers seemed to have determined upon forcing the gate, and, so far as I could see, there was very little danger to fear from any other quarter.

I knew Lieutenant Leigh was not a coward, but he seemed very half-hearted over the defence, doing his duty but in a sullen sort of way; and of course that was because he wanted to take the lead now held by Captain Dyer; and, perhaps it was misjudging

him, but I'm afraid just at that time he'd have been very glad if a shot had dropped his rival, and he could have stepped into his place.

Captain Dyer's plan to keep the rabble at bay till help could come, was of course quite right; and that night it was an understood thing, that another attempt should be made to send a messenger to Wallahbad, another of our corporals being selected for the dangerous mission.

The fighting was kept on, in an on-and-off way till evening, we losing several men, but a good many fallings on the other side, which made them more cautious, and not once did we have a chance of touching a man with the bayonet. Some of our men grumbled a little at this, saying that it was very hard to stand there hour after hour to be shot down; and could they have done as they liked, they'd have made a sally.

Then came the night, and a short consultation between the captain and Lieutenant Leigh. The mutineers had ceased firing at sundown, and we were in hopes that there would be a rest till daylight, but all the same the strictest watch was kept, and only half the men lay down at a time.

Half the night, though, had not passed, when a hand was laid upon my shoulder, and in an instant I was up, piece in hand, to find that it was Captain Dyer.

'Come here,' he said quietly; and following him into the room underneath where the women were placed, he told me to listen, and I did, to hear a low, grating, tearing noise, as of something scraping on stone. 'That's been going on,' he said, 'for a good hour, and I can't make it out, Smith.'

'Prisoners escaping,' I said quietly.

'But they are not so near as that. They were confined in the next room but one,' he said in a whisper.

'Broke through, then,' I said.

Then we went—Captain Dyer and I—quietly up on to the roof, answered the challenge, and then walked to the edge, where, leaning over, we could hear the dull grating noise once more; then a stone seemed to fall out on to the sandy way by the palace walls.

It was all plain enough: they had broken through from one room to another, where there was a window no bigger than a loophole, and they were widening this.

'Quick, here, sentry,' says the captain.

The next minute the sentry hurried up, and we had a man posted as nearly over the window as we could guess, and then I had my orders in a minute:

'Take two men and the sentry at their door, rush in, and secure them at once. But if they have got out, join Sergeant Williams, and follow me to act as reserve, for I am going to make a sally by the gate to stop them from the outside.'

I roused Harry Lant and Measles, and they were with me in an instant. We passed a couple of sentries, and gave the countersign, and then mounted to the long stone passage which led to where the prisoners had been placed.

As we three privates neared the door, the sentry there challenged; but when we came up to him and listened, there was not a sound to be heard, neither had he heard anything, he said. The next minute the door was thrown open, and we found an empty room; but a hole in the wall shewed us which way the prisoners had gone.

We none of us much liked the idea of going through that hole to be taken at a disadvantage, but duty was duty, and running forward, I made a bold thrust through with my piece in two or three directions; then I crept through, followed by Harry Lant, and found that room empty too; but they had not gone by the doorway which led into the women's part, but

enlarged the window, and dropped down, leaving a large opening—one that, if we had not detected it then, would no doubt have done nicely for the entrance of a strong party of enemies.

'Sentry here,' I said; and leaving the man at the window, followed by Harry Lant and Measles, I ran back, got down to the court-yard, crossed to where Sergeant Williams with half-a-dozen men waited our coming, and then we were passed through the gate, and went along at the double to where we could hear noise and shouting.

We had the narrow alley to go through—the one I have before mentioned as being between the place we had strengthened and the next building; and no sooner were we at the end, than we found we were none too soon, for there, in the dim starlight, we could see Captain Dyer and four men surrounded by a good score, howling and cutting at them like so many demons, and plainly to be seen by their white calico things.

'By your left, my lads, shoulder to shoulder—double,' says the sergeant.

Then we gave a cheer, and with hearts bounding with excitement, down we rushed upon the scoundrels to give them their first taste of the bayonet, cutting Captain Dyer and two more men out, just as the other two went down.

It was as fierce a fight that, as it was short; for we soon found the alarm spread, and enemies running up on all sides. It was bayonet-drill then, and well we shewed the practice, till we retired slowly to the entrance of the alley; but the pattering of feet and cries told that there were more coming to meet us that way; when, following Captain Dyer's orders, we retreated in good form in the other direction, so as to get round to the gate by the other alley, on the south side.

And now for the first time we gave them a volley, checking the advance for a few seconds, while we retreated loading, to turn again, and give them another volley, which checked them again; but only for a few seconds, when they came down upon us like a swarm of bees, right upon our bayonets; and as fast as half-a-dozen fell, half-a-dozen more were leaping upon the steel.

We kept our line, though, one and all, retiring in good order to the mouth of the second court, which ran down by the south side of the palace; when, as if maddened at the idea of losing us, a whole host of them came at us with a rush, breaking our line, and driving us anyhow, mixed up together, down the alley, which was dark as pitch; but not so dark but that we could make out a turban or a calico cloth, and those bayonets of ours were used to some purpose.

Half-a-dozen times over I heard the captain's voice cheering us on, and shouting: 'Gate, gate!' Then I saw the flash of his sword once, and managed to pin a fellow who was making at him, just as we got out at the other end with a fierce rush. Then I heard the captain shout 'Rally!' and saw him wave his sword; and then I don't recollect any more, for it was one wild fierce scuffle—stab and thrust, in the midst of a surging, howling, maddened mob, forcing us towards the gateway.

I thought it was all over with us, when there came a cheer, and the gate was thrown open, a dozen men formed, and charged down, driving the niggers back like sheep; and then, somehow or another, we were cut out, and, under cover of the new-comers, reached the gate.

A ringing volley was then given into the thick of the mutineers as they came pouring on again; but the next moment all were safely inside, and the gate was thrust to and barred; and, panting and bleeding, we stood, six of us, trying to get our breath.

'This wouldn't have happened,' says a voice, 'if my

advice had been taken. I wish the black scoundrels had been shot. 'Where's Captain Dyer?'

There was no answer, and a dead chill fell on me as I seemed to realise that things had come now to a bad pass.

'Where's Sergeant Williams?' said Lieutenant Leigh again; but it seemed to me that he spoke in a husky voice.

'Here!' said some one faintly, and, turning, there was the sergeant seated on the ground, and supporting himself against the breast-work.

'Any one know the other men who went out on this mad sally?' says the lieutenant.

'Where's Harry Lant?' I says.

There was no answer here either, and this time it was my turn to speak in a queer husky voice as I said again:

'Where's Measles? I mean Sam Bigley.'

'He's gone, too, poor chap,' says some one.

'No, he ain't gone neither,' says a voice behind me, and, turning, there was Measles tying a handkerchief round his head, muttering the while about some black devil. 'I ain't gone, nor I ain't much hurt,' he growled; 'and if I don't take it out of some on 'em for this chop o' the head, it's a rum un; and that's all I've got to say.'

'Load,' says Lieutenant Leigh shortly; and we loaded again, and then fired two or three volleys at the niggers as they came up towards the gate once more; when some one calls out:

'Ain't none of us going to make a sally party, and bring in the captain?'

'Silence there, in the ranks!' shouts Lieutenant Leigh; and though it had a bad sound coming from him as it did, and situated as he was, no one knew better than I did, how that it would have been utter madness to have gone out again; for even if he were alive, instead of bringing in Captain Dyer, now that the whole mob was roused, we should have all been cut to pieces.

It was as if in answer to the lieutenant's order that silence seemed to fall then, both inside and outside the palace—a silence that was only broken now and then by the half-smothered groan of some poor fellow who had been hurt in the sortie—though the way in which those men of ours did bear wounds, some of them even that were positively awful, was a something worth a line in history.

Yes, there was a silence fell upon the place for the rest of that night, and I remember thinking of the wounds that had been made in two poor hearts by that bad night's work; and I can say now, faithful and true, that there was not a selfish thought in my heart as I remembered Lizzy Green, any more than there was when Miss Ross came uppermost in my mind, for I knew well enough that they must have soon known of the disaster that had befallen our little party.

XIII.

Whatever those poor women suffered, they took care it should not be seen by us men, and indeed we had little time to think of them the next day. We had given ourselves the task to protect them, and we were fighting hard to do it, and that was all we could do then; for the enemy gave us but little peace; not making any savage attack, but harassing us in a cruel way, every man acting like for himself, and all the discipline the sepoys had learned seeming to be forgotten.

As for Lieutenant Leigh, he looked cold and stern, but there was no flinching with him now; he was in command, and he shewed it; and though I never liked the man, I must say that he shewed himself now a brave and clever officer; and but for his skilful arrangement of the few men under his charge, that place would have fallen half-a-dozen times over.

We had taken no prisoners, so that there was no chance of talking of exchange; though I believe to a man all thought that the captain and files missing from our company were dead.

The women now lent us their help, bringing down spare muskets and cartridges, loading too for us; so that when the mutineers made an attack, we were able to keep up a much sharper fire than we should have done under other circumstances.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, when, hot and exhausted, we were firing away, for the bullets were coming thick and fast through the gateway, flying across the yard, and making a passage in that direction nearly certain death, when I felt a strange choking feeling, for Measles says to me all at once:

'Look there, Ike.'

I looked, and I could hardly believe it, and rubbed my eyes, for just in the thickest of the firing there was the sound of merry laughter, and those two children of the colonel's came toddling out, right across the line of fire, turned back to look up at some one calling to them from the window, and then stood still, laughing and clapping their hands.

I don't know how it was, I only know that it wasn't to look brave, but, dropping my piece, I rushed to catch them, just at the same moment as did Miss Ross and Lizzy Green; while, directly after, Lieutenant Leigh rushed from where he was, caught Miss Ross round the waist, and dragged her away, as I did Lizzy and the children.

How it was that we were none of us hit, seems strange to me, for all the time the bullets were pattering on the wall beyond us. I only know I turned sick and faint as I just said to Lizzy: 'Thank God for that!' and she led off the children; Miss Ross shrinking from Lieutenant Leigh with a strange mistrustful look, as if she were afraid of him; and the next minute they were under cover, and we were back at our posts.

'Poor bairns!' says Measles to me, 'I ain't often glad of anything, Ike Smith, but I am glad they ain't hurt. Now my soul seemed to run and help them myself, but my legs seemed as if they couldn't move. You need not believe it without you like,' he added in his sour way.

'But I do believe it, old fellow,' I said warmly, as I held out my hand. 'Chaff's chaff, but you never knew me make light of a good act done by a true-hearted comrade.'

'All right,' says Measles gruffly. 'Now, see me pot that sower.—Missed him, by Jove!' he exclaimed, as soon as he had fired. 'These pieces ain't true. No! hit him! He's down! That's one bairn-killer the less.'

'Sam,' I said just then, 'what's that coming up between the huts yonder?'

'Looks like a wagin,' says Measles. 'Tis a wagin, ain't it?'

'No,' I said, feeling that miserable I didn't know what to do; 'it isn't a wagon, Sam; but— Why, there's another. A couple of field-pieces!'

'Nine-pounders, by all that's unlucky,' said Measles, slapping his thigh. 'Then I tell you what it is, Ike Smith—it's about time we said our prayers.'

I didn't answer, for the words would not come; but it was what had always been my dread, and it seemed now that the end was very near.

Troubles were coming upon us thick; for being relieved a short time after, to go and have some tea that Mrs Bantem had got ready, I saw something that made me stop short, and think of where we should be if the water supply was run out, for though we had the chatties down below in the vault under the north end, we wanted what there was in the tank, while there was *Nabob*, the great elephant,

drawing it up in his trunk, and cooling himself by squirting it all over his back!

I went to Lieutenant Leigh, and pointed it out to him; and the great beast was led away; when, there being nothing else for it, we opened a way through our breast-work, watched an opportunity, threw open the gate, and he marched out right straight in amongst the mutineers, who cheered loudly, after their fashion, as he came up to them.

There was no more firing in that night, and taking it in turns, we, some of us, had a sleep, I among the rest, all dressed as I was, and with my gun in my hand, ready for use at a moment's notice; and I remember thinking what a deal depended on the sentries, and how thoroughly our lives were in their hands; and then my next thought was of how was it possible for it to be morning, for I had only seemed to close my eyes, and then open them again on the light of day.

But morning it was; and with a dull, dead feeling of misery upon me, I got up and gave myself a shake, ran the ramrod down my piece, to see that it was charged all right, looked to the cap, and then once more prepared for the continuation of the struggle, low-spirited and disheartened, but thankful for the bit of refreshing rest I had had.

A couple of hours passed, and there was no movement on the part of the enemy; the ladies never stirred, but we could hear the children laughing and playing about, and how one did seem to envy the little light-hearted, thoughtless things! But my thoughts were soon turned into another direction, for Lieutenant Leigh ordered me up into one of the rooms commanding the gateway, and looking out on the square where the guns were standing, and came up with me himself.

'You'll have a good look-out from here, Smith,' he said; 'and being a good shot'—

He didn't say any more, for he was, like me, taken up with the movement in the square—a lot of the mutineers running the two guns forward in front of the gate, and then closing round them, so that we could not see what was going on; but we knew well enough that they were charging them, and there seemed nothing for it but to let them fire, unless by a bold sally we could get out and spike them.

Just then, Lieutenant Leigh looked at me, and I at him, when, touching my cap in salute, I said: 'Two good nails, sir, and a tap on each would do it.'

'Yes, Smith,' he said grimly; 'but who is to drive those two nails home?'

I didn't answer him for a minute, I should think, for I was thinking over matters, about life, and about Lizzy, and now that Harry Lant was gone, it seemed to me that there might be a chance for me; but still duty was duty, and if men could not in such a desperate time as this risk something, what was the good of soldiers?

'I'll drive 'em home, sir,' I says then quietly, 'or they shall drive me home!'

He looked at me for an instant, and then nodded.

'I'll get the men ready,' he says; 'it's our only chance; and with a bold dash we may do it. I'll see to the armourer's chest for hammers and spikes. I'll spike one, Smith, and you the other; but, mind, if I fail, help me, as I will you, if you fail; and God help us! Keep a sharp look-out till I come back.'

He left the room, and I heard a little movement below, as of the men getting ready for the sally; and all the while I stood watching the crowd in front, which now began hurraing and cheering; and there was a motion which shewed that the guns were being run in nearer, till they stopped about fifty yards from the gate.

'What makes him so long?' I thought, trembling with excitement; 'another minute, perhaps, and the gate will be battered down, and that mob rushing in.'

Then I thought that we ought all who escaped from the sortie, in case of failure, to be ready to take to the rooms adjoining where I was, which would be our last hope; and then I almost dropped my piece, my mouth grew dry, and I seemed choked, for, with a loud howl, the crowd opened out, and I saw a sight that made my blood run cold—those two nine-pounders standing with a man by each breech, smoking linstock in hand; while bound, with their heads against the muzzles, and their white faces towards us, were Captain Dyer and Harry Lant!

One spark—one touch of the linstock on the breech—and those two brave fellows' heads would be blown to atoms; and, as I expected that every moment such would be the case, my knees knocked together; but the next moment I was down on those shaking knees, my piece made ready, and a good aim taken, so that I could have dropped one of the gunners before he was able to fire.

I hesitated for a moment before I made up my mind which to try and save, and the thought of Lizzy Green came in my mind, and I said to myself: 'I love her too well to give her pain,' when, giving up Captain Dyer, I aimed at the gunner by poor Harry Lant.

'Don't fire,' said a voice just then, and, turning, there was Lieutenant Leigh. 'The black-hearted wretches,' he muttered. 'But we are all ready; though now, if we start, it will be the signal for the death of those two.—But what does this mean?'

What made him say that, was a chief, all in shawls, who rode forward and shouted out in good English, that they gave us one hour to surrender; but, at the end of that time, if we had not marched out without arms, they would blow their prisoners away from the mouth of the guns.

Then, for fear we had not heard it, he spurred his horse up to within ten yards of the gate, and shouted it out again, so that every one could hear it through the place; and, though I could have sent a bullet through and through him, I could not help admiring the bold daring fellow, riding up right to the muzzles of our pieces.

But all the admiration I felt was gone the next moment, as I thought of the cruelties practised, and of those bound there to those gun-muzzles.

There was nothing said for a few minutes, for I expected the lieutenant to speak; but as he did not, I turned to him and said:

'If all was ready, sir, I could drop one gunner; and I'd trust Measles—Sam Bigley—to drop the other, when a bold dash might do it. You see they've retired a good thirty yards, and we should only have twenty more to run than they; while the surprise would give us that start. A good sharp jack-knife would set the prisoners free, and a covering-party would perhaps check the pursuit while we got in.'

'We shall have to try it, Smith,' he said, his breath coming thick and fast with excitement; and then he seemed to turn white, for Miss Ross and Lizzy came into the room.

XIV.

I should think it must have been the devil tempting Lieutenant Leigh, or he would never have done as he did; for, as he looked at Miss Ross, the change that came over him was quite startling. He could read all that was passing in her heart; there was no need for her to lay her hand upon his arm, and point with the other out of the window, as in a voice that I didn't know for hers, she said:

'Will you leave those two brave men there to die, Lieutenant Leigh?'

He didn't answer for a moment, but seemed to be struggling with himself; then, speaking as huskily as she did, he said:

'Send away that girl!' and before I could go

to her—for I should have done it then, I know—and whisper a few words of hope, poor Lizzy went out, mourning for Harry Lant, wringing her hands; and I stood at my post, a sentry by my commander's orders, so that it was no spying on my part if I heard what followed.

I believe Lieutenant Leigh fancied he was speaking in an undertone, when he led Miss Ross away to a corner, and spoke to her; but this was perhaps the most exciting moment in his life, and his voice rose in spite of himself, so that I heard all; while she, poor thing, I believe forgot all about my presence; and, as a sentry—a machine almost—placed there, what right had I to speak?

'Will you leave him?' said Miss Ross again. 'Will you not try to save him?'

Lieutenant Leigh did not answer for a bit, for he was making his plans, and I felt quite staggered as I saw through them.

'You see how he is placed: what can I do?' said Lieutenant Leigh. 'If I go, it is the signal for firing. You see the gunners waiting. And why should I risk the lives of my men, and my own, to save him? He is a soldier, and it is the fortune of war: he must die.'

'Are you a man, or a coward?' said Miss Ross angrily.

'No coward,' he said fiercely; 'but a poor slighted man, whom you have wronged, jilted, and ill-used; and now you come to me to save your lover's life—to give mine for it. You have robbed me of all that is pleasant between you; and now you ask more. Is it just?'

'Lieutenant Leigh, you are speaking madly. How can you be so unjust?' she cried, holding tightly by his arm, for he was turning away, while I felt mad with him for torturing the poor girl, when it was decided that the attempt was to be made.

'I am not unjust,' he said. 'The hazard is too great; and what should I gain if I succeeded? Pshaw! Why, if he were saved, it would be at the expense of my own life.'

'I would die to save him,' she said hoarsely.

'I know it, Elsie; but you would not give a loving word to save me. You would send me out to my death without compunction—without a care; and yet you know how I have loved you.'

'You—you loved me; and yet stand and see my heart torn—see me suffer like this!' cried Miss Ross, and there was something half wild in her looks as she spoke.

'Love you!' he cried; 'yes, you know how I have loved you!—'

His voice sank here; but he was talking in her ear excitedly, saying words that made her shrink from him up to the wall, and look at him as if he were some object of the greatest disgust.

'You can choose,' he said bitterly, as he saw her action; and he turned away from her.

The next moment she was on her knees before him, holding up her hands as if in prayer.

'Promise me,' he said, 'and I will do it.'

'Oh, some other way—some other way!' she cried piteously, her face all drawn the while.

'As you will,' he said coldly.

'But think—oh, think! You cannot expect it of me. Have mercy! Oh, what am I saying?'

'Saying!' he cried, catching her hands in his, and speaking excitedly and fast—'saying things that are sending him to his death! What do I offer you? Love, devotion, all that man can give. He would, if asked now, give up all for his life; and yet you, who profess to love him so dearly, refuse to make that sacrifice for his sake! You cannot love him. If he could hear now, he would implore you to do it. Think. I risk all. Most likely, my life will be given for his; perhaps we shall both fall. But you

refuse. Enough: I must go; I cannot stay. There are many lives here under my charge; they must not be neglected for the sake of one. As I said before, it is the fortune of war; and, poor fellow, he has but a quarter of an hour or so to live, unless help comes.'

'Unless help comes,' groaned Miss Ross frantically, when, as Lieutenant Leigh reached the door, watching me over his shoulder the while, Miss Ross went down on her knees, stretched out her hands towards where Captain Dyer was bound to the gun, and then she rose, cold, and hard, and stern, and turned to Lieutenant Leigh, holding out her hand. 'I promise,' she said hoarsely.

'On your oath, before God?' he exclaimed joyfully, as he caught her in his arms.

'As God is my judge,' she faltered with her eyes upturned; and then, as he held her to his breast, kissing her passionately, she shivered and shuddered, and, as he released her, sank in a heap on the floor.

'Smith,' cried Lieutenant Leigh; 'right face—forward!' and as I passed Miss Ross, I heard her sob in a tone I shall never forget: 'O Lawrence, Lawrence!' and then a groan tore from her breast, and I heard no more.

'This is contrary to rule. As commandant, I ought to stay in the fort; but I've no one to give the leadership to, so I take it myself,' said Lieutenant Leigh; 'and now, my lads, make ready—present! That's well. Are all ready? At the word "Fire!" Privates Bigley and Smith fire at the two gunners. If they miss, I cry fire again, and Privates Bantem and Grainger try their skill; then, at the double, down on the guns. Smith and I spike them, while Bantem and Grainger cut the cords. Mind this: those guns must be spiked, and those two prisoners brought in; and if the sortie is well managed, it is easy, for they will be taken by surprise. Hush! Confound it, men; no cheering.'

He only spoke in time, for in the excitement the men were about to hurray.

'Now, then, is that gate unbarred?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Is the covering-party ready?'

'Yes, sir.'

My hand trembled as he spoke; but the next instant it was of a piece with my gunstock. There was the hot square, with the sun shining on the two guns that must have been hot behind the poor prisoners' heads; there stood the two gunners in white, with their smoking linstocks, leaning against the wheels, for discipline was slack; and there, thirty or forty yards behind, were the mutineers, lounging about, and smoking many of them. For all firing had ceased, and judging that we should not risk having the prisoners blown away from the guns, the mutineers came boldly up within range, as if defying us, and it was pretty safe practice at some of them now.

I saw all this at a glance, and while it seemed as if the order would never come; but come it did, at last.

'Fire!'

Bang! the two rifles going off like one; and the gunner behind Captain Dyer leaped into the air, while the one I aimed at seemed to sink down suddenly beside the wheel he had leaned upon. Then the gate flew open, and with a rush and a cheer, we, ten of us, raced down for the guns.

Double-quick time? I tell you it was a hard race; and being without my gun now—only my bayonet stuck in my trousers' waist-band—I was there first, and had driven my spike into the touch-hole before Lieutenant Leigh reached his; but the next moment

his was done, the cords were cut, and the prisoners loose from the guns. But now we had to get back.

The first inkling I had of the difficulty of this was seeing Captain Dyer and Harry Lant stagger, and fall forward; but they were saved by the men, and we saw directly that they must be carried.

No sooner thought of than done.

'Hoist Harry on my back,' says Grainger; and he took him like a sack; Bantem acting the same part by Captain Dyer; and those two ran off, while we tried to cover them.

For don't you imagine that the mutineers were idle all this while; not a bit of it. They were completely taken by surprise, though, at first, and gave us time nearly to get to the guns before they could understand what we meant; but the next moment some shouted and ran at us, and some began firing; while by the time the prisoners were cast loose, they were down upon us in a hand-to-hand fight.

And in those fierce struggles there is such excitement, that, for my part, I've now but a very misty recollection of what took place; but I do recollect seeing the prisoners well on the way back, hearing a cheer from our men, and then, hammer in one hand, bayonet in the other, fighting my way backward along with my comrades. Then all at once a glittering flash came in the air, and I felt a dull cut on the face, followed directly after by another strange, numbing blow, which made me drop my bayonet, as my arm fell uselessly to my side; and then with a lurch and a stagger, I fell, and was trampled upon twice, when, as I rallied once, a black, savage-looking sepooy raised his clubbed musket to knock out my brains, but a voice I well knew cried: 'Not this time, my fine fellow. That's number three, that is, and well home;' and I saw Measles drive his bayonet with a crash through the fellow's breast-bone, so that he fell across my legs.—'Now, old chap, come along,' he shouts, and an arm was passed under me.

'Run, Measles, run!' I said as well as I could. 'It's all over with me.'

'No; taint,' he said; 'and don't be a fool. Let me do as I like, for once in a way.'

I don't know how he did it, nor how, feeling sick and faint as I did, I managed to get on my legs; but old Measles stuck to me like a true comrade, and brought me in. For one moment I was struggling to my feet; and the next, after what seemed a deal of firing going over my head, I was inside the breastwork, listening to our men cheering and firing away, as the mutineers came howling and raging up almost to the very gates.

'All in?' I heard Lieutenant Leigh ask.

'To a man, sir,' says some one; 'but Private Bantem is hurt.'

'Hold your tongue, will you!' says Joe Bantem. 'I ain't killed, nor yet half. How would you like your wife frightened if you had one?'

'How's Private Lant?'

'Cut to pieces, sir,' says some one softly.

'I'm thankful that you are not wounded, Captain Dyer,' then says Lieutenant Leigh.

'God, bless you, Leigh!' says the captain faintly: 'it was a brave act. I've only a scratch or two when I can get over the numbness of my limbs.'

I heard all this in a dim sort of fashion, just as if it was a dream in the early morning; for I was leaning up against the wall, with my face laid open and bleeding, and my left arm smashed by a bullet, and nobody just then took any notice of me, because they were carrying in Captain Dyer and Harry Lant; while the next minute, the fire was going on hard and fast; for the mutineers were furious, and I suppose they danced round the guns in a way that shewed how mad they were about the spiking.

As for me, I did not seem to be in a great deal of

pain; but I got turning over in my mind how well we had done it that morning; and I felt proud of it all, and glad that Captain Dyer and Harry Lant were brought in; but all the same what I had heard lay like a load upon me; and knowing, as I did, that poor Miss Ross had, as it were, sold herself to save the captain's life, and that she had, in a way of speaking, been cheated into doing so, I felt that when the opportunity came, I must tell the captain all I knew. When I had got as far as that with my thoughts, the dull numbness began to leave me, and everything else was driven out of my mind by the thought of my wound; and I got asking myself whether it was going to be very bad, for I thought it was, so getting up a little, I began to crawl along in the shade towards the ruined south end of the palace, nobody seeming to notice me.

XVI.

I daresay you who read this don't know what the sensation is of having one arm-bone shivered, and the dead limb swinging helplessly about in your sleeve, whilst a great miserable sensation comes over you that you are of no more use—that you are only a broken pitcher, fit to hold water no more, but only to be broken up to mend the road with. There were all those women and children wanting my help, and the help of hundreds more such as me, and instead of being of use, I knew that I must be a miserable burden to everybody, and only in the way.

Now, whether man—as some of the great philosophers say—did gradually get developed from the beast of the field, I'm not going to pretend to know; but what I do know is this—that, leave him in his natural state, and when he, for some reason or another, forgets all that has been taught him, he seems very much like an animal, and acts as such.

It was something after this fashion with me then, for feeling like a poor brute out of a herd that has been shot by the hunters, I did just the same as it would—crawled away to find a place where I might hide myself and lie down and die.

You'll laugh, I daresay, when I tell you my sensations just then, and I'm ready to laugh at them now myself; for, in the midst of my pain and suffering, it came to me that I felt precisely as I did when I was a young shaver of ten years old. One Sunday afternoon, when everybody but mother and me had gone to church, and she had fallen asleep, I got father's big clay-pipe, rammed it full of tobacco out of his great lead box, and then took it into the back kitchen, feeling as grand as a churchwarden, and set to and smoked it till I turned giddy and faint, and the place seemed swimming about me.

Now, that was just how I felt when I crawled about in that place, trying not to meet anybody, lest the women should see me all covered with blood; and at last I got, as I thought, into a room where I should be all alone.

I say I crawled; and that's what I did do, on one hand and my knees, the fingers of my broken arm trailing over the white marble floor, with each finger making a horrible red mark, when all at once I stopped, drew myself up stiffly, and leaned trembling and dizzy up against the wall, trying hard not to faint. For I found that I wasn't alone, and that in place of getting away—crawling into some hole to lie down and die, I was that low-spirited and weak—I had come to a place where one of the women was, for there, upon her knees, was Lizzy Green, sobbing and crying, and tossing her hands about in the agony of her poor heart.

I was misty, and faint, and confused, you know; but perhaps it was something like instinct made me crawl to Lizzy's favourite place, for it was not intended. She did not see me, for her back was my

way; and I did not mean her to know I was there; for in spite of my giddiness, I seemed to feel that she had learned all the news about our failure, and that she was crying about poor Harry Lant.

'And he deserves to be cried for, poor chap,' I said to myself, for I forgot all about my own pains then; but all the same something very dark and bitter came over me, as I wished that she had been crying instead for poor me.

'But then he was always so bright, and merry, and clever,' I thought, 'and just the man who would make his way with a woman; while I—— Please God, let me die now!' I whispered to myself directly after, 'for I'm only a poor, broken, helpless object, in everybody's way.'

It seemed just then as if the hot weak tears that came running out of my eyes made me clearer, and better able to hear all that the sobbing girl said, as I leaned closer and closer to the wall; while, as to the sharp pain every word she said gave me, the dull dead aching of my broken arm was nothing.

'Why—why did they let him go?' the poor girl sobbed: 'as if there were not enough to be killed without him; and him so brave, and stout, and handsome, and true. My poor heart's broken. What shall I do?'

Then she sobbed again; and I remember thinking that unless help soon came, if poor Harry Lant died of his wounds, she would soon go to join him in that land where there was to be no more suffering and pain.

Then I listened, for she was speaking again.

'If I could only have died for him, or been with, or—— Oh, what have I done, that I should be made to suffer so?'

I remember wondering whether she was suffering more than that I was; for, in spite of my jealous despairing feeling, there was something of sorrow mixed up with it for her.

For she had always seemed to like poor Harry's merry ways, when I never could get a smile from her; and she'd go and sit with Mrs Bantem for long enough when Harry was there, while if by chance I went, it seemed like the signal for her to get up, and say her young lady wanted her, when most likely Harry would walk back with her; and I went and told it all to my pipe.

'If he'd only known how I'd loved him,' she sobbed again, 'he'd have said one kind word to me before he went, have kissed me, perhaps, once; but no, not a look nor a sign! Ah! Isaac, Isaac! I shall never see you more!'

What—what? What was it choking me? What was it that sent what blood I had left gushing up in a dizzy cloud over my eyes, so that I could only gasp out once the one word 'Lizzy!' as I started to my feet, and stood staring at her in a helpless, half-blind fashion; for it seemed as though I had been mistaken, and that it was possible after all that she had been crying for me, believing me to be dead; but the next moment I was shrinking away from her, hiding my wounded face with my hand for fear she should see it, for leaping up, hot and flush-cheeked, and with those eyes of hers flashing at me, she was at my side with a bound.

'You cowardly, cruel, bad fellow!' she half-shrieked; 'how dare you stand in that mean deceitful way, listening to my words? Oh, that I should be such a weak fool, with a stupid, blabbing, chattering tongue, to keep on kneeling and crying there, telling lies, every one of them, and—— Get away with you!'

I think it was a smile that was on my face then, as she gave me a fierce thrust on the wounded arm, when I staggered towards her. I know the pain was as if a red-hot hand had grasped me; but I smiled all the same, and then, as I fell, I heard her cry out

two words, in a wild agonised way, that went right to my heart, making it leap before all was blank; for I knew that those words meant that, in spite of all my doubts, I was loved.

'O Isaac!' she cried, in a wild frightened way, and then, as I said, all was blank and dark for I don't know how long; but I seemed to wake up to what was to me then like heaven, for my head was resting on Lizzy's breast, and, half-mad with fear and grief, she was kissing my pale face again and again.

'Try—try to forgive me for being so cruel, so unfeeling,' she sobbed; and then for a moment, as she saw me smile, she was about to fly out again, fierce-like, at having betrayed herself, and let me know how she loved me. Even in those few minutes I could read it all: how her passionate little heart was fighting against discipline, and how angry she was with herself; but I saw it all pass away directly, as she looked down at my bleeding face, and eagerly asked me if I was very much hurt.

I tried to answer, but I could not; for the same deathly feeling of sickness came on again, and I saw nothing.

I suppose, though, it only lasted a few minutes, for I woke like again to hear a panting hard breathing, as of some one using great exertion, and then I felt that I was being moved; but, for the life of me, for a few moments I could not make it out, till I heard the faint buzz of voices, when I found that Lizzy, the little fierce girl, who seemed to be as nothing beside me, was actually, in her excitement, carrying me to where she could get help, struggling along panting, a few feet at a time, beneath my weight, and me too helpless and weak to say a word.

'Good heavens! look!' I heard some one say the next moment, and I think it was Miss Ross; but it was some time before I came to myself again enough to find that I was lying with a rolled-up cloak under my head, and Lizzy bathing my lips from time to time, with what I afterwards learned was her share of the water.

But what struck me most now was the way in which she was altered: her sharp, angry way was gone, and she seemed to be changed into a soft gentle woman, without a single flirty way or thought, but always ready to flinch and shrink away until she saw how it troubled me, when she'd creep back to kneel down by my side, and put her little hand in mine; when, to make the same comparison again that I made before, I tell you that there, in that besieged and ruined place, half-starved, choked with thirst, and surrounded by a set of demons thirsting for our blood—I tell you that it seemed to me like being in heaven.

XVII.

I don't know how time passed then; but the next thing I remember is listening to the firing for a while, and then, leaning on Lizzy, being helped to the women's quarters, where, in spite of all they could do, those children would keep escaping from their mother to get to Harry Lant, who lay close to me, poor fellow, smiling and looking happy whenever they came near him; and I smiled, too, and felt as happy when Lizzy, after tending me with Mrs Bantem as long as was necessary, got bathing Harry's forehead with water and moistening his lips.

'Poor fellow,' I thought, 'it will do him good;' and I lay watching Lizzy moving about afterwards, and then I think I must have gone to sleep, or have fallen into a dull numb state, from which I was awakened by a voice I knew; and opening my eyes, I saw that Miss Ross, pale and scared-looking, was on her knees by the side of Harry Lant, and that Captain Dyer was there.

'Not one word of welcome,' he said, with a strange

drawn look on his face, which deepened, as Miss Ross rose and went close to him.

'Yes,' she said; 'thank God you have returned safe.—No, no; don't touch me,' she cried hoarsely. 'Here, take me away—lead me out of this!' she said, for at that moment Lieutenant Leigh came quietly in, and she put her hands in his. 'Take me out,' she said again hoarsely; and then like some one muttering in a dream: 'Take me away—take me away.'

I said that drawn strange look on Captain Dyer's face seemed to deepen as he stood watching whilst those two went out together; then he passed his hand over his eyes, as if to ask himself whether it was a dream; and then, with a groan, he leaned one hand against the wall, feeling his way out from the room, and something seemed to hinder me from calling out to him, and telling him what I knew. For I was reasoning with myself, what ought I to do? and then, sick and faint, I seemed to sleep again.

But this time I was waked up by a loud shrieking, and a rush of feet, and, confused as I was, I knew what it meant: the hole where the blacks escaped—Chunder and his party—had not been properly guarded, and the mutineers had climbed up and made an entrance.

The alarm spread fast enough, but not quick enough to save life; for, with a howl, half-a-dozen sepoys, with their scarlet and white coats open, dashed in with fixed bayonets, and two women were borne to the ground in an instant, while a couple of wretches made a dash at those two children—Little Cock Robin and Jenny Wren, as we called them—standing there, wondering like, by Harry Lant's bed on the floor, whilst the golden light of the setting sun filled the room, and lit up their little angels' faces.

But with a howl, such as I never heard woman give, Mrs Bantem rushed between them and the children, caught a bayonet in each hand, and held them together, letting them pass under one arm, then with a spring forward she threw those great arms of hers round the black fellows' necks as they hung together, and held them in such a hug as they never suffered from before.

The next moment they were all rolling together on the floor; but that incident saved the lives of those poor children, for there came a cheer now, and Measles and a dozen more were led in by Lieutenant Leigh, and—

There, I am telling you too many horrors. They beat them back step by step, at the point of the bayonet; and a fierce struggle it was, a long fight kept up from room to room, for our men were fierce now as the mutineers, and it was a genuine death-struggle; and the broken window being guarded, not a man of about a dozen mutineers who gained entrance lived to go back and relate their want of success.

And can you wonder, when two of those who fought had found their wives bayoneted; Grainger was one of them; and when the fight was over, during which, raging like a demon, he had bayoneted four men, the poor fellow sat down by his dead wife, took her head first in his lap, then to his breast, and rocked himself to and fro, crying like a child, till there was a bugle-call in the court-yard, when he laid her gently in a corner, carrying her like as if she had been a child, knelt down, and said 'Our Father' right through by her side, kissed her lips two or three times, and then covered her face with a bit of an old red handkerchief; and him all the while covered with blood and dust and black of powder. Then, poor fellow, he got up and took his gun, and went out on the tips of his toes, lest he should wake her who would wake no more in this world.

Perhaps it was weakness, I don't know, but my eyes were very wet just then, and a soft little hand was laid on my breast, and Lizzy's head leant over

me, and her tears, too, fell very fast on my hot and fevered face.

I felt that I should die, not then, perhaps, but before very long, for I knew that my arm was so shattered that it ought to be amputated just below the elbow, while for want of surgical assistance it would mortify; but somehow I felt very happy just then, and my state did not give me much pain, only that I wanted to have been up and doing; and at last Lizzy helping me, I got up, my arm being bandaged and in a sling, to find that I could walk about a little; and I made my way down into the court-yard, where I got near to Captain Dyer, who, better now, and able to limp about, was talking with Lieutenant Leigh, both officers now, and forgetful apparently of all but the present crisis.

'What wounded are there?' said Captain Dyer, as I walked slowly up.

'Nearly every man to some extent,' said Lieutenant Leigh; 'but this man and Lant are the worst.'

'The place ought to be evacuated,' said Captain Dyer; 'it is impossible to hold it another day.'

'We might hold out another day,' said Lieutenant Leigh, 'but not longer. Why not retreat under cover of the night?'

'It seems the only thing left,' said Captain Dyer. 'We might perhaps get to some hiding-place or other before our absence was discovered; but the gate and that back window will be watched of course: how are we to get away with two severely wounded men, the women, and children?'

'That must be planned,' said Lieutenant Leigh; and then the watch was set for the night, as far as could be done, and another time of darkness set in.

It was that which puzzled me, why a good bold attack was not made by night; why, the place must have been carried again and again; but no, we were left each night entirely at rest, and the attacks by day were clumsy and bad. There was no support; every man fought for himself, and after his own fashion, and I suppose that every man did look upon himself as an officer, and resented all discipline. At all events, it was our salvation, though at this time it seemed to me that the end must be coming on the next day, and I remember thinking, that if it did come to the end, I should like to keep one cartridge left in my pouch.

Then my mind went off wandering in a misty way upon a plan to get away by night, and I tried to make one, taking into consideration, that the quarters on the north side of us now, and only separated by ten feet of alley, were in the hands of the mutineers, who camped in them, the same being the case in the quarters on the south side, separated again by the ten feet of alley through which we returned when Captain Dyer and Harry Lant were taken. While on the east was the market plain or square, and on the west a wilderness of open country with huts and sheds. I felt, do you know, that a good plan of escape at this time was just what I ought to make, every one else being busy with duty, and me not able to either fight or stand sentry, so I worked on hard at it that night, trying to be useful in some way; and after a fashion, I worked one out.

But I have not told you what I meant to do with that last cartridge in my pouch; I meant that to be pressed to my lips once before I contrived with one hand to load my rifle, and then if the worst came to the very worst, and when I had waited to the last to see if help would come, then, when it seemed that there was no hope, I meant to do what I told myself it would be my duty, as a man and a soldier, to do, if I loved Lizzy Green—do what more than one man did, during the mutiny, by the woman for whom he had been shedding his heart's best blood; and in the dead of that night I did load that gun, after kissing the bullet; and a deal of pain that gave me,

mental as well as bodily, but I don't think that I need to tell you what that last cartridge was for.

XVIII.

I think by this time you pretty well understand the situation of our palace, and how our stronghold was on the north side, close to which was the gate, so hardly fought for: if you don't, I'm afraid it is my fault, and not yours.

At all events, being at liberty, I went over it here and there, and from floor to roof, as I tried to make out which would be the best way for trying to escape; but somehow I couldn't see it then. To go out from the gate was impossible; and the same related to the broken-out window, as both places were thoroughly watched.

As for the other windows about the place, they were such slips, that without they were widened, any escaping by them was impossible. To have let ourselves down, one by one, from the flat roof by a rope, might have done, but it was a clumsy unsuitable way, with all those children and women, so I gave that up, and then sat down as I was by a little window looking out on to the north alley.

Wearied out at last, I suppose that a sort of stupor came over me, from which I did not wake till morning, to find myself suffering a dull numb pain; but when I opened my eyes I forgot that, because of her who was kneeling beside me, driving away the flies that were buzzing about, as if they knew that I was soon to be for them to rest on, without a hand to sweep them away.

At last, though, as I lay there wondering what could be done to save us, the thought came all at once, and struggling to my feet, I held Lizzy to my heart a minute, and then went off to find Captain Dyer.

It quite took me aback to see his poor haggard face, and the way in which he took the trouble, for it was plain enough to see how he was cut to the heart by Miss Ross's treatment of him. But for all that, he was the officer and the gentleman; he had his duty to do, and he was doing it; so that, if even now, after losing so many men, and with so many more half disabled, if the enemy had made a bold assault now, they would have won the place dearly, though win it they must.

That did not seem their way, though they wanted the place for the sake of the great store of arms and ammunition it contained, but all the same they wanted to buy it cheap.

I found Captain Dyer ready enough to listen to my plan, though he shook his head, and said it was desperate. But after a little thought, he said: 'There are some hours now between this and night—help may come before then; if not, Smith, we must try it. My hands are full, so I leave the preparations with you: let every one carry food and a bottle of water—nothing more—all we want now is to save life.'

I promised I'd see to it; and I went and spoke cheerfully to the women, but Mrs Maine seemed quite hysterical. Miss Ross listened to what I had to say in a hard strange way; and really, if it had not been for Mrs Bantem putting a shoulder first to one wheel and then the other, nothing would have been done.

The next person I went to was Measles, who, during a cessation of the firing, was sitting, black and blood-smear'd, with his head tied up, wiping out his gun with pieces he tore off the sleeves of his shirt.

'Well, Ike, mate,' he says, 'not dead yet, you see. If we get out of this, I mean to have my promotion; but I don't see how we're going to manage it. What bothers me most is, letting these black devils get all this powder and stuff we have here. Blow my rags if we shall ever use it all! I've been firing away till

my old Bess has been so hot that I've been afraid to charge her; and I'll swear I've used twice as many cartridges as any other man. But I say, Ike, old fellow, do you think it's wrong to pot these niggers?'

'No,' I said—'not in a case like this.'

'Glad of it,' he says sincerely; 'because, do you know, old man, I've polished off such a thundering lot, that I've got to be quite nervous about getting killed myself. Only think having forty or fifty black-looking beggars rising up against you in kingdom come, and pointing at you, and saying: "That's the chap as shot me!"'

'I don't think any soldier, acting under orders, who does his duty in defence of women and children, need fear to lie down and die,' I said.

I never saw Measles look soft but that once, as, laying down his ramrod, he took my hand in his, and looked in my face for a bit; then he shook my hand softly, and nodded his head several times.

'How's Harry Land?' he says at last.

'Very bad,' I said.

'Poor old chap. But tell him I've paid some of the beggars out for it. Mind you tell him—it'll make him feel comfortable like, and ease his mind.'

I nodded, and then told him about the plan.

'Well,' he said, as he slowly and thoughtfully polished his gun-barrel, 'it might do, and it mightn't. Seems a run dodge; but, anyhow, we might try.'

'I shall want you to help make the bridge,' I says.

'All right, matey; but I don't, somehow, like leaving the beggars all that ammunition;' and then he loaded his rifle very thoughtfully, but only to rouse up directly after, for the mutineers began firing again; and Captain Dyer giving the order, our men replied swift and fast at every black face that shewed itself for an instant.

That was a day: hot, so that everything you went near seemed burning. The walls even sent forth a heat of their own; and if it hadn't been for the chatties down below, we should have had to give up, for the tank was now completely dried, and the flies buzzing about its mud-caked bottom. But the women went round from man to man with water and biscuit, so that no one left his post, and every time the black scoundrels tried to make a lodgment near the gate, half were shot down, and the rest glad enough to get back into shelter.

Towards that weary slow-coming evening, though, after we had beaten them back—or, rather, after my brave comrades had beaten them back half a score of times—I saw that something was up; and as soon as I saw what that something was, I knew that it was all over, for our men were too much cut up and disheartened for any more gallant sorties.

I've not said any more about the guns, only that we spiked them, and left them standing in the market plain, about fifty yards from the gates. I may tell you now, though, that the next morning they were gone, and we forgot all about them till the night I'm telling you of, when they were dragged out again, with a lot of noise and shouting, from a building in the far corner of the square.

We didn't want telling what that meant.

It was plain enough to all of us that the scoundrels had drilled out the touch-holes again, and that during the night they would be planted, and the first discharge would drive down all our defences, and leave us open to a rush.

'We must try your plan, Smith,' says Captain Dyer with a quiet stern look. 'It is time to evacuate the place now.'

Then he knelt down and took a look at the guns with his glass, and I knew he must have been thinking of how he stood tied to the muzzle of one of them, for he gave a sort of shudder as he closed his glass with a snap.

Just then, Miss Ross came round with Lizzy and

Mrs Bantem, with wine and water, and I saw a sort of quiet triumph in Lieutenant Leigh's face, as, avoiding Captain Dyer, Miss Ross went up to him, as he half-beckoned to her, and stood by him like a slave, giving him bottle and glass, and then standing by his side with her eyes fixed and strange-looking; while, though he fought against it bravely, and tried to be unmoved, Captain Dyer could not bear it, but walked away.

I was just then drinking some water given me by Lizzy, whose pale troubled little face looked up so lovingly in mine that I felt half-ashamed for me, a poor private, to be so happy—for I forgot my wounds then—while my captain was in pain and suffering. And then it was that it struck me that Captain Dyer was just in that state in which men feel despairing, and go and do desperate things. I felt that I ought before now to have told him all about what I had heard, but I was in hopes that things would right themselves, and always came to the conclusion that it was Miss Ross's duty to have given the captain some explanation of her treatment; anyhow, it did not seem to be mine; but when I saw the poor smitten fellow go off like he did, I followed him softly till I came up with him, my heart beating the while with a curious sense of fear.

There was nothing to fear, though: he had only gone up to the roof, and when I came up with him he was evidently calculating about our escape, for he finished off by pulling out his telescope, and looking right across the plain, towards where there was a tank and a small station.

'I think that ought to be our way, Smith,' he said. 'We could stay there for half an hour's rest, and then on again towards Wallahbad, sending a couple of the stoutest men on for help. By the way, we'll try and start a man off to-night, as soon as it's dark. Who will you have to help you?'

'I should like to have Bigley, sir,' I said.

'Will one be sufficient?'

'Quite, sir,' I said; for I thought Measles and I could manage it between us.

Half an hour after, Measles was busy at work, fetching up muskets, with bayonets fixed, from down in the vault, and laying them in order on the flat roof, taking care the while to keep out of sight; and I went to the room where the women were, under Mrs Bantem's management, getting ready for what was to come, for they had been told that we might leave the place all at once.

XIX.

I suppose it was my wound made me do things in a sluggish dreamy way, and made me feel ready to stop and look at any little thing which took my attention. Anyhow, that's the way I acted; and going inside that room, I stopped short just inside the place, for there were those two little children of the colonel's sitting on the floor, with a whole heap of those numbers of the Bible—those that people take in shilling parts—and with two or three large pictures in each. Some one had given them the parts to amuse themselves with; and, as grand and old-fashioned as could be, they were shewing these pictures to the soldiers' children.

As I went in, they'd got a picture open, of Jacob lying asleep, with his dream spread before you, of the great flight of steps leading up into heaven, and the angels going up and down.

'There,' says little Jenny Wren to a boy half as old again as herself; 'those are angels, and they're coming down from heaven, and they've got beautiful wings like birds.'

'Oh,' says little Cock Robin thoughtfully, and he leaned over the picture. Then he says quite seriously: 'If they've got wings, why don't they fly down?'

That was a poser; but Jenny Wren was ready with her answer, old-fashioned as could be, and she says:

'I should think it's toz they were moulting.'

I remember wishing that the poor little innocents had wings of their own, for it seemed to me that they would be a sad trouble to us to get away that night, just at the time when a child's most likely to be cross and fretful.

Night at last, dark as dark, save only a light twinkling here and there, in different parts where the enemy had made their quarters. There was a buzzing in the camp where the guns were, and as we looked over, once there came the grinding noise of a wheel, but only once.

We made sure that the gate and the broken window opening were well watched, for there was the white calico of the sentries to be seen; but soon the darkness hid them, and we should not have known that they were there but for the faint spark now and then which shewed that they were smoking, and once I heard, quite plain in the dead stillness, the sound made by a 'hubble-bubble' pipe.

We waited one hour, and then, with six of us on the roof, the plan I made began to be put into operation.

My idea was that if we could manage to cross the north alley, which as I told you was about ten feet wide, we might then go over the roof of the quarters where the mutineers were; then on to the next roof, which was a few feet lower; and from there get down on to some sheds, from which it would be easy to reach the ground, when the way would be open to us, to escape, with perhaps some hours before we were missed.

The plan was, I know, desperate, but it seemed our only chance, and, as you well know, desperate ventures will sometimes succeed when the most carefully arranged plots fail. At all events, Captain Dyer took it up, and the men under my directions, a couple of muskets were taken at a time, and putting them muzzle to muzzle, the bayonet of each was thrust down the other's barrel, which saved lashing them together, and gave us a sort of spar about ten feet long, and this was done with about fifty.

I told you that there was a tree grew up in the centre of the alley—a stumpy, short-boughed tree, and to this Measles laid one of the double muskets, feeling for a bough to rest it on in the darkness, after listening whether there was any one below; then he laid more and more, till, with a mattress laid upon them, he formed a bridge, over which he boldly crept to the tree, where, with the lashings he had taken, he bound a couple more muskets horizontal, and then shifted the others. He arranged them all so that the butts of one end rested on the roof of the palace; the butts at the other end were across those he had bound pretty level in the tree. Then more and more were laid across, and a couple of thin straw mattresses on them; and though it took a tremendously long time, through Measles fumbling in the dark, it was surprising what a firm bridge that made as far as the tree.

The other half was made in just the same fashion, and much more easily. Mattresses were laid on it; and there, thirty feet above the ground, we had a tolerably firm bridge, one that, though very irregular, a man could cross with ease, creeping on his hands and knees; but then there were the women, children, and poor Harry Lant.

Captain Dyer thought it would be better to say nothing to them about it, but to bring them all quietly up at the last minute, so as to give them no time for thought and fear; and then, the last preparation being made, and a rough, short ladder, eight feet long, Measles and I had contrived, being carried over and planted at the end of the other quarters,

reaching well down to the next roof, we prepared for a start.

Measles and Captain Dyer went over with the ladder, and reported no sentries visible, the bridge pretty firm, and nothing apparently to fear, when it was decided that Harry Lant should be taken over first—Measles volunteering to take him on his back and crawl over—then the women and children were to be got over, and we were to follow.

I know it was hard work for him, but Harry Lant never gave a groan, but let them lash his hands together with a handkerchief, so that Measles put his head through the poor fellow's arms, for there was no trusting to Harry's feeble hold.

'Now then, in silence,' says Captain Dyer; 'and you, Lieutenant Leigh, get up the women and children. But each child is to be taken by a man, who is to be ready to gag the little thing if it utters a sound. Recollect, the lives of all depend on silence.—Now, Bigley, forward!'

'Wait till I spit in my hands, captain,' says Measles, though what he wanted to spit in his hands for, I don't know, without it was from use, being such a spitting man.

But spit in his hands he did, and then he was down on his hands and knees, crawling on to the mattress very slowly, and you could hear the bayonets creaking and gritting, as they played in and out of the musket-barrels; but they held firm, and the next minute Measles was as far as the tree, but only to get his load hitched somehow in a ragged branch, when there was a loud crack as of dead-wood snapping, a struggle, and Measles growled out an oath—he would swear, that fellow would, in spite of all Mrs Bantem said, so you mustn't be surprised at his doing it then.

We all stood and crouched there, with our hearts beating horribly; for it seemed that the next moment we should hear a dull, heavy crash; but instead, there came the sharp fall of a dead branch, and at the same moment there were voices at the end of the alley.

If Captain Dyer dared to have spoken, he would have called 'Halt!' but he was silent; and Measles must have heard the voices, for he never moved, while we listened minute after minute, our necks just over the edge of the roof, till what appeared to be three of the enemy crept cautiously along through the alley, till one tripped and fell over the dead bough that must have been lying right in their way.

Then there was a horrible silence, during which we felt that it was all over with the plan—that the enemy must look up and see the bridge, and bring down those who would attack us with renewed fury.

But the next minute, there came a soft whisper or two, a light rustling, and directly after we knew that the alley was empty.

It seemed useless to go on now; but after five minutes' interval, Captain Dyer determined to pursue the plan, just as Measles came back panting to announce Harry Lant as lying on the roof beyond the officers' quarters.

'And you've no idee what a weight the little chap is,' says Measles to me.—'Now, who's next?'

No one answered; and Lieutenant Leigh stepped forward with Miss Ross. He was about to carry her over; but she thrust him back, and after scanning the bridge for a few moments, she asked for one of the children, and so as to have no time lost, the little boy, fast asleep, bless him! was put in her arms, when brave as brave, if she did not step boldly on to the trembling way, and walk slowly across.

Then Joe Bantem was sent, though he hung back for his wife, till she ordered him on, to go over with a soldier's child on his back; and he was followed by a couple more.

Next came Mrs Bantem, with Mrs Colonel Maine,

and the stout-hearted woman stood as if hesitating for a minute as to how to go, when catching up the colonel's wife, as if she had been a child, she stepped on to the bridge, and two or three men held the butts of the muskets, for it seemed as if they could not bear the strain.

But though my heart seemed in my mouth, and the creaking was terrible, she passed safely over, and it was wonderful what an effect that had on the rest.

'If it'll bear that, it'll bear anything,' says some one close to me; and we went on, one after the other, for the most part crawling, till it came to me and Lizzy Green.

'You'll go now,' I said; but she would not leave me, and we crept on together, till a bough of the tree hindered us, when I made her go first, and a minute after we were hand-in-hand upon the roof of the officers' quarters.

The others followed, Captain Dyer coming last, when, seeing me, he whispered: 'Where's Bigley?' of course meaning Measles.

I looked round, but it was too dark to distinguish one face from another. I had not seen him for the last quarter of an hour—not since he had asked me if I had any matches, and I had passed him half-a-dozen from my tobacco-pouch.

I asked first one, and then another, but nobody had seen Measles; and under the impression that he must have joined Harry Lant, we cautiously walked along the roof, right over the heads of our enemies; for from time to time we could hear beneath our feet the low buzzing sound of voices, and more than once came a terrible catching of the breath, as one of the children whispered or spoke.

It seemed impossible, even now, that we could escape, and I was for proposing to Captain Dyer to risk the noise, and have the bridge taken down, so as to hold the top of the building we were on as a last retreat; but I was stopped from that by Measles coming up to me, when I told him Captain Dyer wanted him, and he crept away once more.

We got down the short ladder in safety, and then crossed a low building, to pass down the ladder on to another, which fortunately for us was empty; and then, with a little contriving and climbing, we dropped into a deserted street of the place, and all stood huddled together, while Captain Dyer and Lieutenant Leigh arranged the order of march.

And that was no light matter; but a litter was made of the short ladder, and Harry Lant laid upon it; the women and children placed in the middle; the men were divided; and the order was given in a low tone to march, and we began to walk right away into the darkness, down the straggling street; but only for the advance-guard to come back directly, and announce that they had stumbled upon an elephant picketed with a couple of camels.

'Any one with them?' said Captain Dyer.

'Could not see a soul, sir,' said Joe Bantem, for he was one of the men.

'Grenadiers, half-left,' said Captain Dyer; 'forward!' and once more we were in motion, tramp, tramp, tramp, but quite softly; Lieutenant Leigh at the rear of the first party, so as to be with Miss Ross, and Captain Dyer in the rear of all, hiding, poor fellow, all he must have felt, and seeming to give up every thought to the escape, and that only.

XX.

I could just make out the great looming figure of an elephant, as we marched slowly on, when I was startled by a low sort of wimmering noise, followed directly after by a grunting on my right.

'What's that?' says Captain Dyer. Then in an instant: 'Threes right!' he cried to the men, and

they faced round, so as to cover the women and children.

There was no farther alarm, though, and all seemed as silent as could be; so once more under orders, the march was continued till we were out from amidst the houses, and travelling over the sandy dusty plain; when there was another alarm—we were followed—so said the men in the rear; and, sure enough, looming up against the darkness—a mass of darkness itself—we could see an elephant.

The men were faced round, and a score of pieces were directed at the great brute; but when within three or four yards, it was plain enough that it was alone, and Measles says aloud: 'Blest if it isn't old *Nabob*.'

The old elephant it was; and passing through, he went up to where Harry Lant was calling him softly, knelt down to order; and then climbing and clinging on as well as they could, the great brute's back was covered with women and children—the broad shallow howdah pretty well taking the lot—while the great beast seemed as pleased as possible to get back amongst his old friends, rubbing his trunk first on this one and then on that; and thankful we were for the help he gave us, for how else we should have got over that desert plain I can't say.

I should think we had gone a good eight miles, when Measles ranges up close aside me as I walked by the elephant, looking up at the riding-party from time to time, and trying to make out which was Lizzy, and pitying them too, for the children were fretful, and it was a sad time they had of it up there.

'They'll have it hot there sometime to-morrow morning, Ike,' says Measles to me.

'Where?' I said faintly, for I was nearly done for, and I did not take much interest in anything.

'Begumbagh,' he says. And when I asked him what he meant, he said: 'How much powder do you think there was down in that vault?'

'A good five hundredweight,' I said.

'All that,' says Measles. 'They'll have it hot, some of 'em.'

'What do you mean?' I said, getting interested.

'Oh, nothing pertickler, mate; only been arranging for promotion for some of 'em, since I can't get it myself. I took the head out of one keg, and emptied it by the others, and made a train to where I've set a candle burning; and when that candle's burnt out, it will set light to another; and that will have to burn out, when some wooden chips will catch fire, and they'll blaze a good deal, and one way and another there'll be enough to burn to last till, say, eight o'clock this morning, by which time the beauties will have got into the place; and then let 'em look out for promotion, for there's enough powder there to startle two or three of 'em.'

'That's what you wanted the matches for, then?' I said.

'That's it, matey; and what do you think of it, eh?'

'You've done wrong, my lad, I'm afraid, and I— I didn't finish; for just then, behind us, there was a bright flashing light, followed by a dull thud; and looking back, we could see what looked like a little fire-work; and though plenty was said just then, no one but Measles and I knew what that flash meant.

'That's a dead failure,' growled Measles to me as we went on. 'I believe I am the unluckiest beggar that ever breathed. That oughtn't to have gone off for hours yet, and now it'll let 'em know we're gone, and that's all.'

I did not say anything, for I was too weak and troubled, and how I kept up as I did, I don't know to this day.

The morning broke at last with the knowledge that we were three miles to the right of the tank Captain Dyer had meant to reach. For a few

minutes, in a quiet stern way, he consulted with Lieutenant Leigh as to what should be done—whether to turn off to the tank, or to press on. The help received from old *Nabob*, made them determine to press on; and after a short rest, and a better arrangement for those who were to ride on the elephant, we went on in the direction of Wallahbad, I, for my part, never expecting to reach it alive. Many a look back did I give to see if we were followed, but it was not until we were within sight of a temple by the roadside, that there was the news spread that there were enemies behind; and though I was ready enough to lay the blame upon Measles, all the same they must have soon found out our flight, and pursued us.

The sun could never have been hotter, nor the ground more parched and dusty than it was now. We were struggling on to reach that temple, which we might perhaps be able to hold till help came; for two men had been sent on to get assistance; though of all those sent, one and all were waylaid and cut down, long before they could reach our friends. But we did not know that then; and in the full hope that before long we should have help, we crawled on to the temple, but only to find it so wide and exposed, that in our weak condition it was little better than being in the open. There was a building, though, about a hundred yards farther on, and towards that we made, every one rousing himself for what was really the last struggle, for not a quarter of a mile off, there was a yelling crowd of blood-hounds in eager pursuit.

It was with a panting rush that we reached the place, to find it must have been the house of the collector of the district; but it was all one wrack and ruin—glass, tables, and chairs smashed; hangings and carpets burnt or ragged to pieces, and in one or two places, blood-stains on the white floor, told a terrible tale of what had taken place not many days before.

The elephant stopped and knelt, and the women and children were passed in as quickly as possible; but before all could be got in, about a dozen of the foremost mutineers were down upon us with a savage rush—I say *us*, but I was helpless, and only looking on from inside—two of our fellows were cut down in an instant, and the others borne back by the fierce charge. Then followed a desperate struggle, ending in the black fellows dragging off Miss Ross and one of the children that she held.

They had not gone many yards, though, before Captain Dyer and Lieutenant Leigh seemed to see the peril together, and shouting to our men, sword in hand they went at the black fiends, well supported by half-a-dozen of our poor wounded chaps.

There was a rush, and a cloud of dust; then there was the noise of yells and cheers, and Captain Dyer shouting to the men to come on; and it all acted like something intoxicating on me, for, catching up a musket, I was making for the door, when I felt an arm holding me back, and I did what I must have done as soon as I got outside—reeled and fainted dead away.

XXI.

It was a couple of hours after when I came to, and became sufficiently sensible to know that I was lying with my head in Lizzy's lap, and Harry Lant close beside me. It was very dim, and the heat seemed stifling, so that I asked Lizzy where we were, and she told me in the cellar of the house—a large wide vault, where the women, children, and wounded had been placed for safety, while the noise and firing above told of what was taking place.

I was going to ask about Miss Ross, but just then I caught sight of her trying to support her sister, and to keep the children quiet.

As I got more used to the gloom, I made out that there was a small iron grating on one side, through which came what little light and air we got; on the other, a flight of stone steps leading up to where the struggle was going on. There was a strong wooden door at the top of this, and twice that door was opened for a wounded man to be brought down; when, coolly as if she were in barracks, there was that noble woman, Mrs Bantem, tying up and binding sword-cuts and bayonet-thrusts as she talked cheerily to the men.

The struggle was very fierce still, the men who brought down the wounded hurrying away, for there was no sign of flinching; but soon they were back with another poor fellow, who was now whimpering, now muttering fiercely:

'If I'd only have had—curse them!—if I'd only had another cartridge or two, I wouldn't have cared,' he said as they laid him down close by me; 'but I always was the unluckiest beggar on the face of the earth. They've most done for me, Ike, and no wonder, for it's all fifty to one up there, and I don't believe a man of ours has a shot left.'

Again the door closed on the two men who had brought down poor Measles, hacked almost to pieces; and again it was opened, to bring down another wounded man, and this one was Lieutenant Leigh. They laid him down, and were off back up the steps, when there was a yelling, like as if all the devils in hell had broken loose, and as the door was opened, Captain Dyer and half-a-dozen more were beaten back, and I thought they would have been followed down—but no; they stood fast in that doorway, Captain Dyer and the six with him, while the two fellows who had been down leaped up the stairs to support them, so that, in that narrow opening, there were eight sharp British bayonets, and the captain's sword, making such a steel hedge as the mutineers could not pass.

They could not contrive either to fire at our party, on account of the wall in front, and every attempt at an entrance was thwarted; but we all knew that it was only a question of time, for it was impossible for man to do more.

There seemed now to be a lull, and only a buzzing of voices above us, mingled with a groan and a dying cry now and then, when I quite forgot my pain once more on hearing poor Harry Lant, who had for some time been quite off his head, and raving, commence talking in a quiet sort of way.

'Where's Ike Smith?' he said. 'It's all dark here; and I want to say good-bye to him.'

I was kneeling by his side the next minute, holding his hand.

'God bless you, Ike,' he said; 'and God bless her. I'm going, old mate; kiss her for me, and tell her that if she hadn't been made for you, I could have loved her very dearly.'

What could I do or say, when the next minute Lizzy was kneeling on his other side, holding his hand?

'God bless you both,' he whispered. 'You'll get out of the trouble after all; and don't forget me.'

We promised him we would not, as well as we could, for we were both choked with sorrow; and then he said, talking quickly:

'Give poor old Sam Measles my tobacco-box, Ike, the brass one, and shake hands with him for me; and now I want Mother Bantem.'

She was by his side directly, to lift him gently in her arms, calling him her poor gallant boy, her brave lad, and no end of fond expressions.

'I never had a bairn, Harry,' she sobbed; 'but if I could have had one, I'd have liked him to be like you, my own gallant, light-hearted soldier boy; and you were always to me as a son.'

'Was I?' says Harry softly. 'I'm glad of it, for I never knew what it was to have a mother.'

He seemed to fall off to sleep after that, when, no one noticing them, those two children came up, and the first I heard of it was little Clive crying: 'Ally Lant—Ally Lant, open eyes, and come and play wis elfant.'

I started, and looked up to see one of those little innocents—his face smeared, and his little hands all dabbled with blood, trying to open poor Harry Lant's eyes with his tiny fingers.

'Why don't Ally Lant come and play with us?' says the other; and just then he opened his eyes, and looked at them with a smile, when in a moment I saw what was happening, for that poor fellow's last act was to get those two children's hands in his, as if he felt that he should like to let his last grasp in this world be upon something innocent; and then there was a deepening of that smile into a stern look, his lips moved, and all was over; while I was too far off to hear his last words.

But there was one there who did hear them, and she told me afterwards, sobbing as though her heart would break.

'Poor Harry, poor light-hearted Harry,' Mother Bantem said. 'And did you see the happy smile upon his face as he passed away, clasping those two poor children's hands—so peaceful, so quiet, after all his suffering; forgetting all then, but what seemed like two angels' faces by his dying pillow, for he said, Ike, he said—'

Poor Mother Bantem broke down here, and I thought about what Harry's dying pillow had been—her faithful, old, motherly breast. But she forced back her sobs, and wiped the tears from her rough, plain face, as she said in low, reverent tones: 'Poor Harry! His last words: "Of such is the kingdom of Heaven."'

Death was very busy amongst our poor company, and one—two—three more passed away there, for they were riddled with wounds; and then I saw that, in spite of all that could be done, Lieutenant Leigh would be the next. He had received his death-wound, and he knew it too; and now he lay very still, holding tightly by Miss Ross's hand, while she knelt beside him.

Captain Dyer, with his eight men, all left, were still keeping the door; but of late they had not been interfered with, and the poor fellows were able to do one another a good turn in binding up wounds. But what all were now suffering for want of, was water; and beyond a few drops in one or two of the bottles carried by the women, there was none to be had.

As for me, I could only lie there helpless, and in a half-dreamy way, see and listen to all that was going on. The spirit in me was good to help; but think of my state—going for days with that cut on the face, and a broken arm, and in that climate.

I was puzzling myself about this time as to what was going to happen next, for I could not understand why the rebels were so quiet; but the next minute I was watching Lieutenant Leigh, and thinking about the morning when we saw Captain Dyer bound to the muzzle of the nine-pounder.

Could he have been thinking about the same thing? I say yes, for all at once he started right up, looking wild and excited. He had hold of Miss Ross's hand; but he threw it from him, as he called out: 'Now, my lads, a bold race, and a short one. We must bring them in. Spike the guns—cut the cords. Now, then—Elsie or death. Are you ready there? Forward!'

That last word rang through the vault we were in, and Captain Dyer ran down the steps, his hacked sword hanging from his wrist by the knot. But he was too late to take his messmate's hand in his, and say *farewell*, if that had been his intention, for Lieutenant Leigh had fallen back; and that senseless figure by his side was to all appearance as dead,

when, with a quivering lip, Captain Dyer gently lifted her, and bore her to where, half stupefied, Mrs Colonel Maine was sitting.

XXII.

I got rather confused, and am to this day, about how the time went; things that only took a few minutes seeming to be hours in happening, and what really did take a long time gliding away as if by magic. I think I was very often in a half-delirious state; but I can well remember what was the cause of the silence above.

Captain Dyer was the first to see, and taking a rifle in his hand, he whispered an order or two; and then he, with two more, rushed into the passage, and got the door drawn towards us, for it opened outwards; but in so doing, he slipped on the floor, and fell with a bayonet-thrust through his shoulder, when, with a yell of rage—it was no cheer this time—our men dashed forward, and dragged him in; the door was pulled to, and held close; and then those poor wounded fellows—heroes I call 'em—stood angrily muttering.

I think I got more excited over that scene than over any part of the struggle, and all because I was lying there helpless; but it was of no use to fret, though I lay there with the weak tears running down my cheeks, as that brave man was brought down, and laid near the grating, with Mother Bantem at work directly to tear off his coat, and begin to bandage, as if she had been brought up in a hospital.

The door was forsaken, for there was a new guard there, that no one would try to pass, for the silence was explained to us all: first, there was a loud yelling and shrieking outside; and then there was a little thin blue wreath of smoke beginning to curl under the door, crawling along the top step, and collecting like so much blue water, to spread very slowly; for the fiends had been carrying out their wounded and dead, and were now going to burn us where we lay.

I can recollect all that; for now a maddening sense of horror seemed to come upon me, to think that those few poor souls left were to be slain in such a barbarous way, after all the gallant struggle for life; but what surprised me was the calm, quiet way in which all seemed to take it.

Once, indeed, the men had a talk together, and asked the women to join them in a rush through the passage; and they gave up the thought directly, for they knew that if they could get by the flames, there were more cruel foes outside, waiting to thrust them back.

So they all sat down in a quiet, resigned way, listening to the crackle outside the door, watching the thin smoke filter through the crevices, and form in clouds, or pools, according to where it came through.

And you'd have wondered to see those poor fellows, how they acted: why, Joe Bantem rubbed his face with his handkerchief, smoothed his hair and whiskers, and then got his belts square, as if off out on parade, before going and sitting quietly down by his wife.

Measles lay very still, gently humming over the old child's hymn, *Oh! that'll be joyful*, but only to burst out again into a fit of grumbling.

Another went and knelt down in a corner, where he stayed; the rest shook hands all round, and then, seeing Captain Dyer sitting up, and sensible, they went and saluted him, and asked leave to shake hands with him, quite upsetting him, poor fellow, as he called them, in a faint voice, his 'brave lads,' and asked their pardon, if he'd ever been too harsh with them.

'God bless you! no, sir,' says Joe Bantem, jumping up, and shaking the hand himself, 'which that

you've never been, but always a good officer as your company loved. Keep a brave heart, my boys, it'll soon be over. We've stood in front of death too many times now to shew the white feather. Hurray for Captain Dyer, and may he have his regiment in the other land, and we be some of his men!'

Joe Bantem gave a bit of a reel as he said this, and then he'd have fallen if it hadn't been for his wife; and though his was rather strong language, you see it must be excused, for, leave alone his wounds, and the mad feeling they'd bring on, there was a wild excitement on the men then, brought on by the fighting, which made them, as you may say, half-drunk.

We must all have been choked over and over again, but for that grating; for the hotter the fire grew above, the finer current of air swept in. The mutineers could not have known of it, or one of their first acts must have been to seal it up. But it was half-covered by some creeping flower, which made it invisible to them, and so we were able to breathe.

And now it may seem a curious thing, but I'm going to say a little more about love. A strange time, you'll perhaps say, when those poor people were crouching together in that horrible vault, expecting their death moment by moment. But that's why it was, and not from any want of retiring modesty. I believe that those poor souls wished to shew those they loved how true was that feeling; and therefore it was that wife crept to husband's side, and Lizzy Green, forgetting all else now, placed her arms round my neck, and her lips to mine, and kissed me again and again.

It was no time for scruples; and thus it was that, being close to them, I heard Miss Ross, kneeling by the side of Captain Dyer, ask him, sobbing bitterly the while—ask him to forgive her, while he looked almost cold and strange at her, till she whispered to him long and earnestly, when I knew that she must be telling him all about the events of that morning. It must have been, for with a cry of joy I saw him bend towards her, when she threw her arms round him, and clasped his poor bleeding form to her breast.

They were so when I last looked upon them, and every one seemed lost in his or her own suffering, all save those two children, one of whom was asleep on Mrs Maine's lap, and the other playing with the gold knot of Captain Dyer's sword.

Then came a time of misty smoke and heat, and the crackling of woodwork; but all the while there was a stream of hot pure air rushing in at that grating to give us life.

We could hear the black fiends running round and round the burning building, yelling, and no doubt ready to thrust back any one who tried to get out. But there seemed then to come another misty time, from which I was roused by Lizzy whispering to me: 'Is it very near now?'

'What?' I said faintly.

'Death,' she whispered, with her lips close to my ear. 'If it is, pray God that He will never let us part again in the land where all is peace!'

I tried to answer her, but I could not, for the hot, stifling, blinding smoke was now in my throat, when the yelling outside seemed to increase. There was a loud rushing sound; the tramping of horses; the jingling of cavalry sabres; a loud English hurra; and a crash; and I knew that there was a charge of horse sweeping by. Then came the hurried beating of feet, the ring of platoon after platoon of musketry, a rapid, squandering, skirmishing fire; more yelling, and more English cheers; the rush, again, of galloping horses; and, by slow degrees, the sound of a fierce skirmish, growing more and more distant, till there came another rapid beating of hoofs, a sudden halt, the jingle and rattle of harness, and a moment after, bim—bom—bom—bom! at regular intervals; and I waved my hand, and gave a faint cheer, for I could

mentally see it all: a troop of light-horse had charged twice; the infantry had come up at the double; and now here were the horse-artillery, with their light six-pounders, playing upon the retreating rebels where the cavalry were not cutting them up.

That faint cheer of mine brought out some more; and then there was a terrible silence, for the relief seemed to have come too late; but a couple of our men crawled to the grating, where the air reviving them, they gave another 'Hurra!' which was answered directly.

And then there was a loud shout, the excited buzz of voices, the crashing of a pioneer's axe against the framework of the grating; and after a hard fight, from which our friends were beaten back again and again, we poor wretches, nearly all insensible, were dragged out about a quarter of an hour before the burning house fell with a crash. Then there was a raging whirlwind of flame, and smoke, and sparks, and the cellar was choked up with the burning ruin.

XXIII.

How well I remember coming to myself as I lay there on the grass, with our old surgeon, Mr Hughes, kneeling by my side; for it was our own men that formed the infantry of the column, with a troop of lancers, and one of horse-artillery. There was Colonel Maine kneeling by his wife, who, poor soul, was recovering fast, and him turning from her to the children, and back again; while it was hard work to keep our men from following up the pursuit, now kept up by the lancers and horse-artillery, so mad and excited were they to find only eight wounded men out of the company they had left.

But, one way and another, the mutineers paid dear for what suffering they caused us. I can undertake to say that, for every life they took, half-a-dozen of their own side fell—the explosion swept away, I suppose, quite fifty, just as they had attempted a surprise, and came over from the south side in a night-attack; while the way in which they were cut up in the engagement was something awful.

For, anxious beyond measure at not hearing news of the party left in Begumbagh, Colonel Maine had at length obtained permission to go round by that station, reinforce the troops, and then join the general by another route.

They were making forced marches, when they caught sight of the rebels yelling round the burning building, fully a couple of hundred being outside; when, not knowing of the sore strait of those within, they had charged down, driving the murderous black scoundrels before them like so much chaff.

But you must not think that our pains were at an end. Is it not told in the pages of history how for long enough it was a hard fight for a standing in India, and how our troops were in many places sore put to it; while home after home was made desolate by the most cruel outrages! It was many a long week before we could be said to be in safety; but I don't know that I suffered much beyond the pains of that arm, or rather that stump, for our surgeon, Mr Hughes, when I grumbled a little at his taking it off, told me I might be very thankful that I had escaped with life, for he had never known of such a case before.

But it was rather hard lying alone there in the temporary hospital, missing the tender hands that one loved.

And yet I have no right to say quite alone, for poor old Measles was on one side, and Joe Bantem on the other, with Mrs Bantem doing all she could for us three, as well as five more of our poor fellows.

More than once I heard Mr Hughes talk about the

men's wounds, and say it was wonderful how they could live through them; but live they all seemed disposed to, except poor Measles, who was terrible bad and delirious, till one day, when he could hardly speak above a whisper, he says to me—being quite in his right mind:

'I daresay some of you chaps think that I'm going to take my discharge; but all the same, you're wrong, for I mean to go in now for promotion!'

He said 'now;' but what he did then was to go in for sleep—and sleep he did for a good four-and-twenty hours—when he woke up grumbling, and calling himself the most unlucky beggar that ever breathed.

Time went on; and one by one we poor fellows got out of hospital cured; but I was the last; and it was many months after, that, at his wish, I called upon Captain—then Major—Dyer, at his house in London. For, during those many months, the mutiny had been suppressed, and our regiment had been ordered home.

I was very weak and pale, and I hadn't got used to this empty sleeve, and things looked very gloomy ahead; but, somehow, that day when I called at Major Dyer's seemed the turning-point; for, to a poor soldier there was something very soothing for your old officer to jump up, with both hands outstretched to catch yours, and to greet you as warmly as did his handsome, bonny wife.

They seemed as if they could hardly make enough of me; but the sight of their happiness made me feel low-spirited; and I felt no better when Mrs Dyer—God bless her!—took my hand in hers, and led me to the next room, where she said there was an old friend wanted to see me.

I felt that soft jewelled hand holding mine, and I heard the door close as Mrs Dyer went out again, and then I stood seeing nothing—hearing nothing—feeling nothing, but a pair of clinging arms round my neck, and a tear-wet face pressed to mine.

And did that make me feel happy?

No! I can say it with truth. For as the mist cleared away from my eyes, and I looked down on, to me, the brightest, truest face the sun ever shone on, there was a great sorrow in my heart, as I told myself that it was a sin and a wrong for me, a poor invalided soldier, to think of taking advantage of that fine handsome girl, and tying her down to one who was maimed for life.

And at last, with the weak tears running down my cheeks, I told her of how it could not be: that I should be wronging her, and that she must think no more of me, only as a dear friend; when there is that amount of folly in this world, that my heart swelled, and a great ball seemed rising in my throat, and I choked again and again, as those arms clung tighter and tighter round my neck, and Lizzy called me her hero, and her brave lad who had saved her life again and again; and asked me to take her to my heart, and keep her there; for her to try and be to me a worthy loving wife—one that would never say a bitter word to me as long as she lived.

I said that there was so much folly in this world, so how can you wonder at me catching it of her, when she was so close that I could feel her breath upon my cheeks, my hair, my eyes, as once more, forgetting all in her love, she kissed me again and again. How, then, could I help, but with that one hand press her to my heart, and go the way that weak heart of mine wished.

I know it was wrong; but how can one always fight against weakness. And, to tell you the truth, I had fought long enough—so long that I wished for peace. And I must say this, too, you must not be hard on Lizzy, and think that it would have been better for her to have let me do a little more of

the courting: there are exceptional cases, and this was one.

I had a true friend in Major Dyer, and to him I owe my present position—not a very grand one; but speaking honestly as a man, I don't believe, if I had been a general, some one at home could think more of me; while, as to this empty sleeve, she's proud of it, and says that all the country is the same.

Wandering about as a regiment is, one does not often have a chance to see one's old messmates; but Sergeant and Mrs Bantem, and Sergeant Measles did have tea and supper with us one night here in London, Mrs Bantem saying that Measles was as proud of his promotion as a dog with two tails, though Measles did say he was an unlucky beggar, or he'd have been a captain. And, my! what a night we did have of that, without one drawback, only Measles would spit on my wife's Brussels carpet; and so we did have a night last year when the old regiment was stationed at Edinburgh, and the wife and me had a holiday, and went down and saw

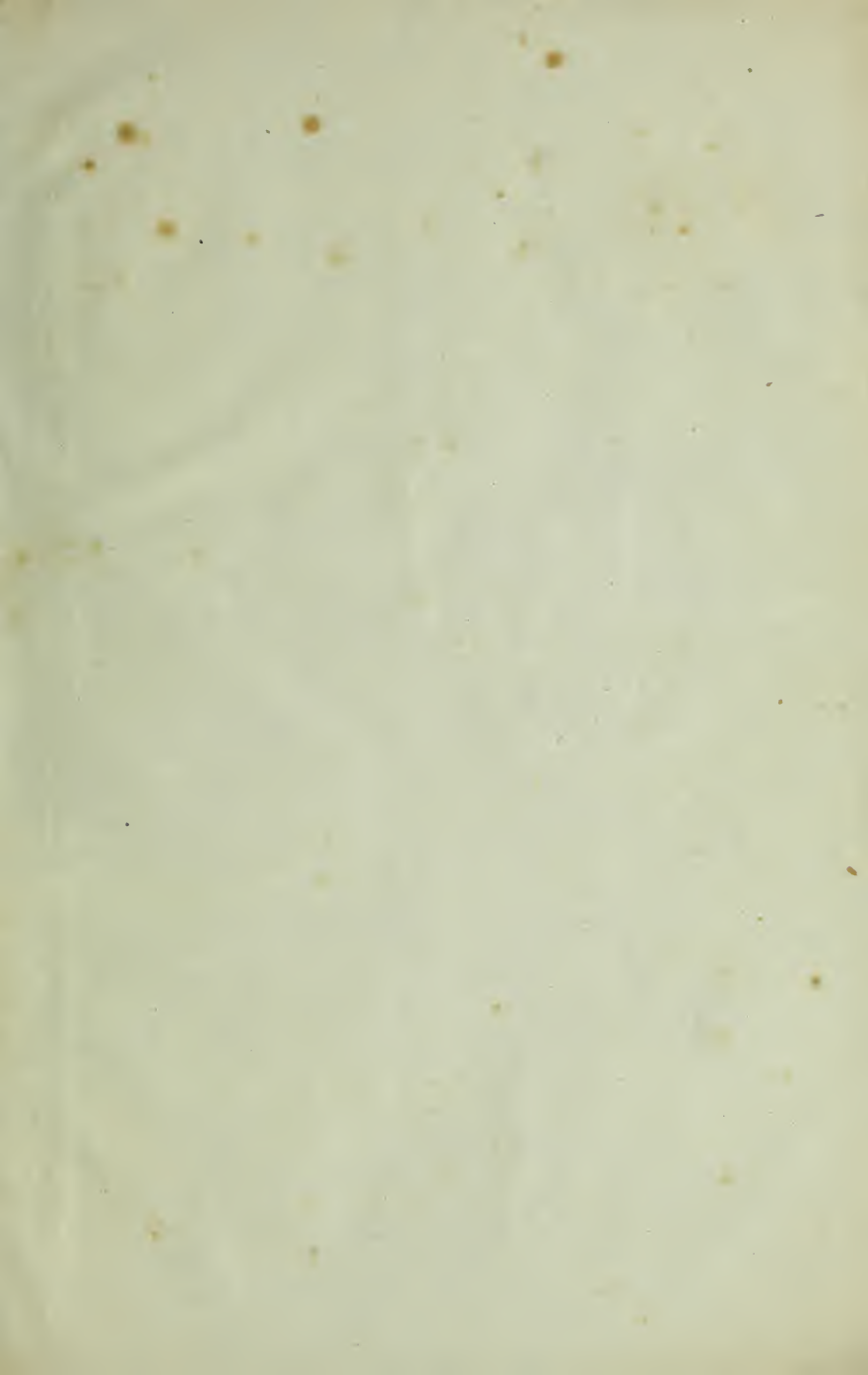
Colonel and Mrs Maine, and those children grown up a'most into a man and woman. But Colonel Dyer had exchanged into another regiment, and they say he is going to retire on half-pay, on account of his wound troubling him.

We fought our old battles over again on those nights; and we did not forget the past and gone; for Mrs Bantem stood up after supper, with her stiff glass of grog in her hand—a glass into which I saw a couple of tears fall—as she spoke of the dead—the brave men who fell in defence of the defenceless and innocent, hoping that the earth lay lightly on the grave of Lieutenant Leigh, while she proposed the memory of brave Harry Lant.

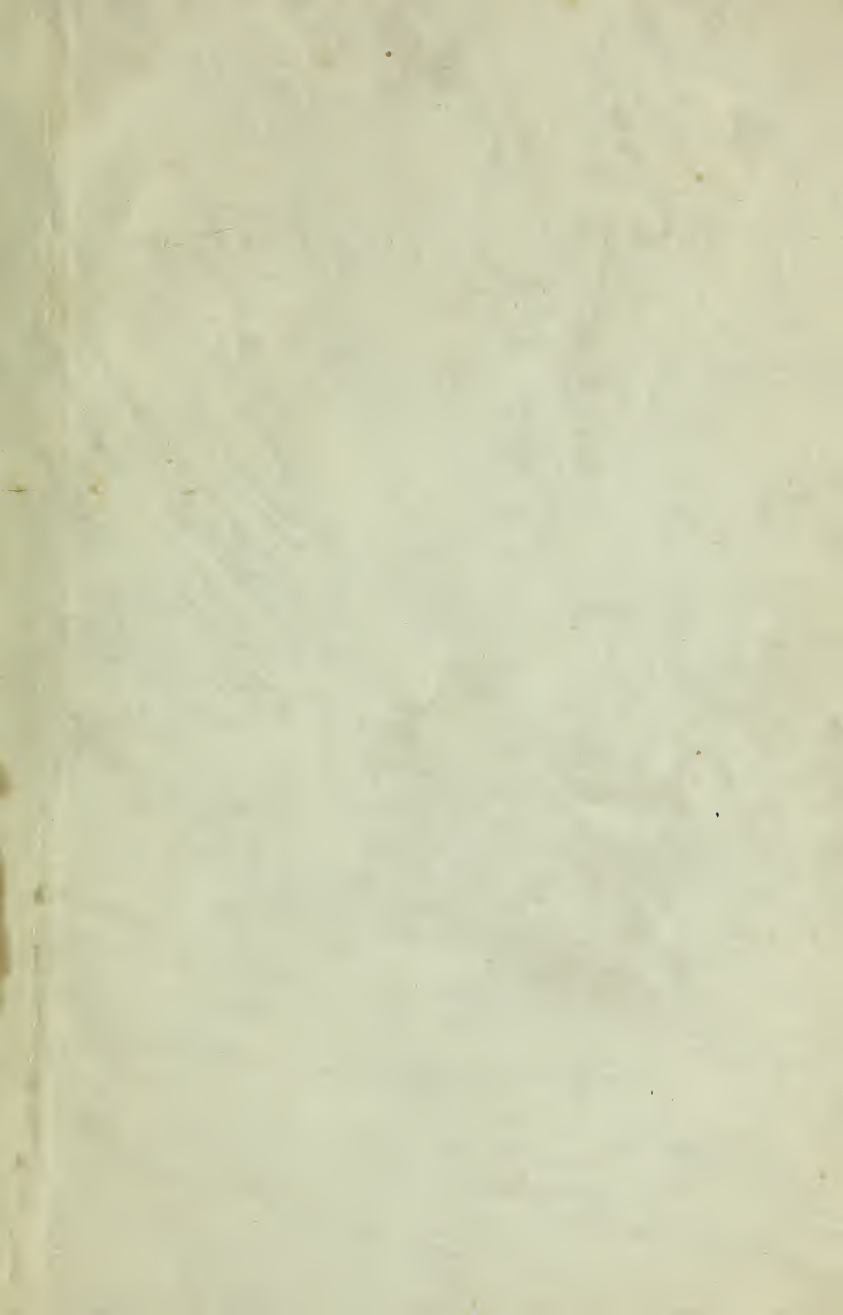
We drank that toast in silence; and more than one eye was wet as the old scenes came back—scenes such as I hope may never fall to the lot of men again to witness; for if there is ever a fervent prayer sent up to the Maker of All, by me, an old soldier, who has much to answer for, it is contained in those words, so familiar to you all at the season of Christmas:

'PEACE ON EARTH!' *Amen.*









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